

BOOK-EXCHANGE

CHICAGO

20

¢

337 BROADWAY

LOVELY, SO EVIL, SO DEAD

189
THE

Death WISH

**ELISABETH
SANXAY HOLDING**



"RECOMMENDED FOR ITS PLOT INGENUITY"

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE



A TENSE MYSTERY NOVEL

The DEATH WISH

Elisabeth Sanxay Holding



POPULAR LIBRARY

•

NEW YORK

POPULAR LIBRARY EDITION

**COMPLETE AND
UNABRIDGED**

COPYRIGHT, MCMXXXIV, BY DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY, INC.
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Published by arrangement with Dodd, Mead and Company, Inc.

CHAPTER I

WHITESTONE MAKES A CONFESSION

DELANCEY lit a cigarette, and leaning back in his chair, gazed across the breakfast table toward the window through which he could see the garden in the green freshness of early Summer. He had eaten with excellent appetite, he had slept soundly all night, he felt comfortable and cheerful; he enjoyed the sight of the clear blue sky; he liked to watch the neat, rosy little housemaid moving deftly about the table.

And, as long as possible, he meant to avoid looking at his wife across the table from him. He was very well aware that there were tears in her eyes, which she wanted him to see; he knew that if he spoke to her, she would answer in a grieved, reproachful voice. Presently, of course, he would be obliged to notice her. . . .

He sighed inaudibly. He liked to laugh, to be easy and careless and good-humoured, and Josephine most effectively prevented that. She made his home life a continual uneasiness, with her affectations, her moods, her sudden changes from clinging affection to hostility. Yet he felt no bitterness toward her, no resentment.

"Makes herself more miserable than anyone else," he thought.

He was a man of immense tolerance; a big, stalwart handsome fellow of thirty-five or so, with smiling blue eyes, and bold features that might have been almost too regular if it had not been for that rather long Celtic upper lip of his, that made his mouth half humorous, half rueful. Something of a philosopher he was, in his own careless way; he relished whatever he found good in life, and amiably endured what was disagreeable.

He finished his cigarette, and dropped the glowing end

into his coffee cup, with a faint sizzle. "Well . . ." he said, cheerfully. "I'd better be doing a little work, eh?"

He had to look at her now, at that haggard, olive-skinned face, those brimming dark eyes.

"Well . . ." he said, again.

"Will you be home to lunch?" she asked, with exactly the tone of reproach and challenge he expected.

"I'll try, dear," he assured her.

"No!" she said. "If you've got to 'try'—if it's an effort, I don't want you to come. . . . You didn't really *want* me to breakfast with you."

"My dear girl, I wanted you to get your sleep," he protested. "I thought—"

"It was horrible!" she cried, with sudden vehemence. "I opened my eyes, and saw you creeping out of the room. . . . In that stealthy way . . . You looked—horrible!"

"Now, my dear girl, that's a bit—"

"You frightened me!" she said. "You looked horrible! Like a—"

"Very well!" he interrupted. "We'll leave it at that. I'll ring you up later, about lunch."

Going round the table, he gave her a perfunctory kiss on her cheek that was wet with tears, and went into the hall. Another moment, and he would have lost patience with her. That was too much, to tell him he looked "stealthy" and "horrible," when he simply went down to breakfast in his own house. Stealthy and horrible, eh . . . ?

"She ought to be a writer," he said to himself. "Extraordinary choice of words. . . ."

He took up his soft hat, and put it on, with a casual glance in the mirror as he passed. And stopped short, staring.

The image he had seen, that man in a soft hat pulled low on his forehead, his eyes glancing sidelong. . . . Something in the lighting of the hall had given to his healthy, sun-burned face a strange look of pallor; the hat brim shadowed his eyes, he looked—

"No, damn it!" he cried to himself. "This is . . . This won't do!"

He was in a hurry now to get out into the sunshine; his

footsteps rang out briskly on the drive leading to the garage. The chauffeur came running down the stairs from his living quarters above, putting on his coat as he came.

"You're early, sir," he said, faintly reproachful. "I'd have been at the house in time, all right."

"I know that, Linney," he answered, affably. "But—well—see here! As long as I am early, we might as well stop by for Mr. Whitestone, eh?"

He got into the car, and Linney set off; a good driver the fellow was, careful and sure and quick. Delancey lit another cigarette, and threw it away at once.

"Bad habit," he told himself. "I've never been a heavy smoker, and I won't begin. Upsets your nerves, makes you short-winded. . . . The thing is, to keep fit."

Keep fit—for what? It was as if a voice outside himself had asked him that question, profoundly disturbing. His blue eyes clouded with a sort of bewilderment. He was not in the habit of any self-questioning; he was superbly healthy, equable, easy-going, ready to accept life as it was.

"It's Josephine," he thought. "I mean—I've always heard that if you live with someone who's nervous and fanciful, you're apt to be affected by it."

He frowned, with a sudden little qualm of uneasiness. It dismayed him to think that his sane good-humour might be undermined, his cheerful zest in life shadowed. But that passed, his tolerance returned.

"It's worse for her than for me," he thought.

Things always had been harder for her than for him. Even in the beginning, when he had first begun his gallant attentions toward the wealthy young widow she had then been, he had known very well how much more serious the whole thing was for her than for him. He had liked her; indeed, in his way, he had loved her, but it was not her kind of love. Not that fierce, jealous, sombre passion.

"I'm not capable of that," he thought, with a sigh. "Never have cared that way for anyone . . . I've done my best. I've been faithful to her. I've tried to be considerate. . . . But it's not enough for her. Well . . ."

Well, he couldn't give what he hadn't got. He had been

fond of her, and if he were less fond of her now than he had been at first, he did not show it. No man could do more than his best, and if he had not made her happy, that was really her fault as much as his. He would not deny that her money had made life smoother for him, but after all, he had made a pretty fair return in patience, in unfailing amiability, for three far from easy years.

"Well . . ." he said, again. "After all, I'm only at home—say, fourteen hours a day, and I'm asleep for eight of them. Only leaves six hours a day to keep my temper with the poor girl. . . . Except Saturdays and Sundays."

Unfortunately, this was a Saturday. He would have to go home to lunch, and in the afternoon, if Josephine wanted him to take her out, he would have to do so.

He stopped thinking. He was able to do that; whenever he chose, he could make his mind a blank, and simply absorb, in a half-animal innocence, the sights and sounds and smells about him. They were passing the Luffs' place now, a place he had always admired; something here, some touch of charming carelessness, entirely lacking in his own formal grounds. He liked the way the Luffs' driveway wound through the trees.

"Who's that?" he thought, and in a moment repeated the question to the chauffeur. "Who's that, do you know, Linney?"

"Some relation of Mrs. Luff's, sir," Linney answered, and for a moment his glance left the road, looked where Delancey was looking, at a tall young girl in a striped dress and a wide-brimmed hat, sauntering across the lawn. Delancey had only the briefest glimpse of her face, a grave, beautiful mouth, dark eyes; then they turned a bend in the road, and she was gone, leaving an impression on him of strange charm. She had glanced at them with the aloof unconsciousness of a child, of a creature whose existence is complete, who needs nothing from any other living creature.

"Too bad Josephine had a row with Mrs. Luff," he thought, and sighed again, a resigned sigh. Josephine was always having rows, always shutting doors in his friendly face. Even poor Whitestone . . .

"Lord knows why she's so down on him," he thought. "He's always very polite to her."

He could see Whitestone's house now, through the trees, a beastly little house, he thought it, damp, hemmed in by those dark pines, a jerry-built little house, with a cheap tiled fireplace, built-in settles on the porch, all sorts of "arty" touches. Poor Whitestone hated it himself, but he had to live in it, just as he had to work in an advertising agency, instead of painting remarkable pictures.

"He can paint, all right," thought Delancey. "Fellow's a genius, I think."

His admiration for his friend was perfectly uncritical. He had admired Whitestone and liked him ever since they had been at a preparatory school together; he admitted candidly that Whitestone was far more intelligent than he was, that it was unfair that he should have so much and Whitestone so little. He wanted very much to help Whitestone; he would have done a great deal for him, if Josephine had not been so disagreeable about it. As it was, he had been able to spare twenty or thirty dollars now and then, had paid the poor devil's club dues, a garage bill, things like that.

"Oh, forget it!" he would say, when Whitestone tried to thank him. "Some day when you're famous, you can paint my portrait."

The car stopped outside the cottage, and Linney sounded the horn. This usually brought Whitestone out in a hurry, glad of the chance to ride so comfortably to the railway station instead of taking a bus. But this morning he did not come. The horn sounded again and again, with no result.

"I'll go in and see . . ." said Delancey.

"Only fifteen minutes to catch the train, sir," Linney warned him.

In his heart Delancey knew well enough that it made very little difference whether he caught that train, or any other. He had desk room in a downtown office, where he went every day to open and answer such letters as came addressed to The Washproof Button Fastener Company. An invention of his own, this was, a device for fastening buttons to any sort of material, so that they were almost undetachable. A

good idea, but not very successful. Needed a few improvements, when he could get round to it. . . .

He went along the brick walk, mounted the steps to the narrow porch, and rang the bell.

"Can't have gone," he thought. "Or I'd have seen him at the bus stop."

There was the sound of a quick, light step inside; he smiled to hear it. Rosalind, of course. It was a pleasure to think of her, the one compensation of poor Whitestone's life.

"And a big compensation, too," thought Delancey, somewhat ruefully.

Even the harassments of poverty, he imagined, would not be intolerable with a girl like Rosalind to share them, a gay, valiant, pretty comrade. Their devotion was the most beautiful thing . . .

"Hello, Shawe!" she said cheerfully. "Come in! Robert's not going in to the office this morning. Another headache. . . . Come and have a cup—" Her voice broke; she swallowed, and then went on, cheerful again. "Have a cup of coffee."

Delancey glanced at her compassionately. The poor girl was upset about something; he could see now that her eyes were reddened. Yet she was still so pretty, always so pretty and smart, even in her cotton house-dress, her blond hair waved, her hands beautifully tended; she was so slender and straight.

"Thanks, Rosalind," he said. "So Robert's got another of those headaches, eh? Ought to see an eye specialist, I should think."

"I believe they're nervous headaches," she said, lowering her voice. "He doesn't sleep well, you know. And he lets everything upset him."

"Artistic temperament!" said Delancey, seriously. "Where is he? In bed?"

"No. In the dining-room. Drinking far too much coffee. But come in, Shawe!"

He followed her along the narrow hall to the little dining-room which, in spite of its low ceiling, its cheap furniture, he had always found attractive. More than ever so now,

with the Spring sun shining in, the fresh blue and white cloth on the table, the willow-pattern china, the tulips in a bowl.

"By Jove!" he thought, with a sigh. "Money isn't everything. . . . If Whitestone could realize . . ."

But Whitestone was obviously in a bad mood this morning. He sat slouched in his chair, his dark hair untidy; a lean, haggard fellow of thirty or so, with something unreasonably boyish about him, something touching.

"Hello, old man!" said Delancey. "What's this I hear about a head—?"

"Got the car there?" Whitestone interrupted. "Run me down to the station, will you, Shawe?"

"Oh, Robert!" cried his wife. "Don't think of going to work when you feel—"

"I want to get some Bristol board," he said, curtly.

"But—" she began, and stopped, and Delancey saw her looking at her husband with a curious intensity.

"Worried about him," he thought. "Poor girl. . . ."

Whitestone had risen and walked into the hall.

"Come on!" he cried, impatiently.

Delancey turned his head to give Rosalind a comforting smile, but the smile never happened. He saw a look on her face such as he had never seen before; he had not imagined that she *could* look like this. Always before he had thought of her as a girl; not now, though. Her skin had a dry, blanched look beneath the powder, her eyes were strained, the lids a little wrinkled; with surprise he realized that when she was not gay and smiling, she was not really pretty. Smart, of course, and attractive, nice figure, but not really pretty—and not young. Not like the girl he had seen strolling about the Luffs' garden. Authentic youth there, with its irresistible and undefinable charm; just the way she had turned her head on her slender neck, the complete unconsciousness of her pose. . . . Queer how well he remembered that girl. . . .

"Shawe . . ." said Rosalind, standing very close to him, and speaking in the lowest possible tone. "Poor Robert. . . ."

Do remember, won't you, that he's not himself this morning?"

Delancey nodded in kindly reassurance, but he did not want to look at Rosalind again just then. He felt guilty, ashamed to have discerned that she was not young; he felt very sorry for her.

"For God's sake, come *on!*" shouted Whitestone, in a fury.

"Temperament, eh?" said Delancey, with a smile in Rosalind's direction, and made haste to join his friend. They went along the brick walk at a ridiculous pace; Whitestone was almost running.

"Here, now!" said Delancey, half laughing. "What's the idea?"

"Walk a way with me," said Whitestone. "Linney can pick us up."

"O.K.!" said the good-natured Delancey. "May do your head good. We'll get more shade if we—"

But Whitestone was already striding along the dusty highroad, and after a word to Linney, Delancey set out after him.

"If it's a question of money," he thought, "I've got dam' little just now, and that's a fact. If I can unload those Craddock shares for Josephine, she'll give me a commission, and that'll be something. . . . Thing is, Whitestone lets things get on top of him. Granted he's short of money—and that's no joke. But he's got Rosalind, an ideal home life, sympathy, comradeship, all that. And talent."

He caught up with his friend, and taking his arm, forced him to a more reasonable pace. They went on for a time in silence, the burly, ruddy, handsome Delancey, and his haggard and temperamental friend.

"See here, old man!" said Delancey, presently, troubled by the other's blank aloofness. "What you want to do is, take things a little easier. You upset yourself, and you upset Rosalind—"

"Rosalind?" said Whitestone, turning on him suddenly. "Upset Rosalind? I was just thinking—I wish to God I could kill her."

CHAPTER II

DELANCEY ACCUSED

DELANCEY stopped short in the road, shocked.

"Robert . . ." he said, "you're . . . You shouldn't say things like that, even if you are a bit overwrought."

"Not say it?" said Whitestone, with a smile.

And the smile frightened Delancey. Here on a public road, in the bright Spring morning, he felt a chill run down his spine.

"Is it possible . . . ?" he thought. "I mean, these artists . . . High-strung, and all that . . . I mean, is it possible his mind's affected?"

He glanced cautiously at his friend, but Whitestone was looking at him, still with that strange, mirthless smile.

"Look here, Robert," he said, firmly, "you've got to get away—for a rest. A little trip."

"I'm not going away," said Whitestone. "Not when the only thing that makes life worth living is here."

"What do you mean, Robert?"

"I'll tell you," said Whitestone. "I've got to tell you. All of it. I'll go mad, if I don't. I'm in love."

"Lord!" murmured Delancey, immeasurably distressed. "That's . . . Poor Rosalind. . . ."

"Oh, shut up!" shouted Whitestone, so loudly that Delancey glanced back, alarmed lest someone had heard him. "I know—" Whitestone went on, "that you manage pretty well not to see what you don't want to see, but even you must have noticed. . . . You must have realized what a hell my life has been with that—"

He used a word that made Delancey wince.

"Robert," he said, "you're going to regret this. The fact that you're temporarily infatuated with some other woman—"

"It's not a woman," said Whitestone. "She's only a girl—a kid. She's the loveliest . . . God! And at this moment, she's not half a mile from me!"

"Robert, see here! She's not by any chance the girl who's visiting the Luffs?"

"So you did know, did you?" said Whitestone, with a short laugh. "I suppose it's all over the place. And what the hell do I care? The first time I set eyes on her, two weeks ago, everybody could see how it was with me. And I tell you I don't *care!*"

"You've got to care. Whether you like it or not, you've got to consider . . . your wife."

"Come here!" said Whitestone, and taking his arm, drew him into a little glade of birches beside the road. "You're in for it now, Shawe. You're going to hear—everything. I've got to talk—and you're the best friend I've got."

Delancey would much have preferred not to hear any more, ever.

"This'll blow over," he thought. "I mean to say—if I can get him to go off somewhere for a while. Nerves, that's all. . . ."

Things did blow over. He had learned that much from his own experience. So many things. Josephine's tears and tempers, his own rare moods of puzzled misery—all blew over, and left the sky clear.

"I might be able to borrow enough money to send him away," he thought. "On one of these cruises."

Whitestone had lit a cigarette, and was smoking with deep inhalations. If he hadn't been an artist, thought Delancey, he would have looked like a tramp, in his shirtsleeves, with that low collar. . . . Hadn't shaved, either, this morning. . . .

"I was trapped," Whitestone began. "I never wanted to marry her. She knew it, too. But she 'just felt she could help me so much' . . . That's the way she put it. . . . She led me on. . . . I didn't realize where I was heading until it was too late. She managed so that everyone took it for granted we were going to be married. . . . I imagined myself that I must have said something—must somehow have given her to understand that I cared for her. . . . I was ashamed to back out of it. . . . She was such a damned good woman. . . . I felt like a brute. . . . So I went through with it. And as soon as the trap was sprung, I began to see."

"But Robert . . . See here! You're prejudiced now. You're forgetting all she's done for you."

"No," said Whitestone. "I haven't forgotten *anything* she's done for me—or to me. I remember it all. I lie awake at night, going over it. The first thing she did was to destroy my faith in myself. 'You're such a funny old boy, Robert. . . . Of course you forgot to stop at the Electric Light Company's office' . . . Of course I forgot everything important—like darning cotton and stopping at the dry-cleaner's. I was just a big boy, a poor, helpless boy, hopelessly unpractical. . . . Wonder I managed to keep alive, before I married her. To keep alive, and sell some of my drawings. . . . Then she destroyed my work. 'But you funny old boy, we've got to eat,' she said. So I got this damned job. I was to do my poor, pathetic painting on Sundays and holidays—after I'd mowed the lawn and carried out the ashes, and put up the screens. . . . Oh, I didn't *have* to do a thing. Rosalind would work so hard, and faint, because it was so hot and she was so tired."

"But, Robert—"

"That fainting didn't fool me for long. But even when I knew it was a sham, what could I do? . . . All those burns and cuts . . . You've seen her often enough with her hand bandaged. . . . I knew, long ago, that there wasn't a dam' thing under those bandages. But, oh God, that brave, bright smile . . . !"

A profound uneasiness possessed Delancey. He had seen Rosalind often with a bandaged hand. He had seen the brave, bright smile. What if there really were some truth in Whitestone's passionate grievance? He could scarcely endure to think so; for over a year he had taken a benevolent pleasure in the spectacle of their happiness. . . .

"She made me take this job," Whitestone went on. "And then she wasted the money I made. The blood money. The price of my soul. You must have realized that what I made was enough for us, for the mean way we live."

"Well, I—"

"You didn't want to see," said Whitestone. "When I told you I was in trouble, you'd put your hand in your pocket. But you wouldn't *think*. I made enough. We could

even have saved a little. My tastes are simple. But she has to go to the Beauty Salon every week. She has to buy special shoes—her foot is so narrow. . . . She has to spend more for painting her face than I can afford for my canvases. If I don't give it to her, she runs up bills. Which I'm legally obliged to pay."

His mouth twitched; he stopped a moment.

"She's taken away my money, and my work, and my faith," he said. "She's drained me, she's ruined me. Inch by inch. And now—she's so amused about Elsie. . . . Poor old Robert, without a penny to his name, with his hair getting grey—the pathetic failure—dreaming that a girl like Elsie, could ever take him seriously. . . . This morning at breakfast, she told me, in her cheerful, amused way, that she'd heard gossip about it. 'I'm not going to let people laugh at you, Robert. . . . I've asked your Elsie here to dinner to-night, so that everyone will see there's nothing in it.' "

"But, Robert, perhaps she—"

"I want you to come to dinner to-night—with Elsie," said Whitestone. "The Luffs are coming too. Then you'll see for yourself. I'll tell you in advance what you're going to see. Rosalind's going to be brave and humorous. There'll be a beautiful little dinner—and she'll have a bandage on one hand. . . . Later she'll ask me to bring out some of my paintings—and when I refuse, she'll say what a pity Robert never finishes anything. . . . Oh, yes; she'll be able to show Elsie what she's made of me—her poor, silly failure of a Robert, who couldn't exist without her."

"By heaven!" thought Delancey, aghast. "I'm afraid that's what she does do. . . ."

"She went a little too far this morning," said Whitestone. "I called her a name she didn't like."

"There's no excuse for that," said Delancey, curtly. "She's a—good woman, and she's your wife. I'm surprised, Robert."

"So was she," said Whitestone, "and she's afraid now. She saw."

"Saw—what?"

Whitestone lit another cigarette.

"She knows now what I want to do."

"You mean you're going to leave her?"

"Oh, no!" Whitestone answered, smiling faintly. "No sense in that. She won't give me grounds for a divorce; she'd never let me go. And I want to be free. No. . . . *She's* going to leave *me*."

"But how—?" Delancey began, and was sorry he had begun. That smile of Whitestone's . . .

He wanted to get away in a hurry, he did not want to hear any more, did not want to guess any more. . . . He wanted to get out of the glade, away from his friend, back into the cheerful, everyday world.

"See here, Robert!" he said. "You're overwrought. You get along home now, and dress, and come into town. Meet me at my office, and we'll have lunch together."

"D'you know—" said Whitestone, slowly. "I envy you, Shawe. It's a divine blessing, the faculty you've got for shutting your eyes. You're able to live in that comfortable blindness. You've refused to see how it was with Rosalind and me. And you won't see how you hate Josephine."

"Now, look here!" said Delancey. "You're going too far, Robert. That's a *lie*."

"You—humbug!" said Whitestone, laughing. "It's almost a pity, to try to wake you up. You hate Josephine, and she knows it."

"That's a damned lie!"

"You've told me twice—with that solemn, anxious face of yours—that you dreamed your Josephine was dead. D'you know what that means? *She* does. The second time you told me, she was there. I watched her—and she knew. You were honest—in your dream. It was the death wish, Shawe."

A peculiar sensation assailed Delancey; it was as if cold water trickled down his spine, under his skin. He resented it.

"I won't listen any more to your raving!" he said, angrily.

"You were wishing her dead, Shawe. Wishing that jealous, domineering woman was dead, and out of your way. And that you had your freedom—and her money."

Delancey turned on his heel and walked off.

"Wait!" cried Whitestone, laughing again. "Don't forget

that I want you to dine with me to-night. Seven o'clock."

"I'm not coming," said Delancey. "I don't want to see you again, until you're in a different frame of mind. You've said things . . ."

"Shawe, come back! You can't leave me like this. . . . Shawe—I tell you I'm at the end of the tether."

His voice sounded desperate, almost hysterical. But for once Delancey ignored an appeal. He was shaken by anger.

"He's gone too far, this time," he said to himself, striding along the road toward his car. "I won't forget this in a hurry. He's said inexcusable things. Inexcusable. I mean, making all possible allowances for his temperament and so on. . . ."

The wind stirred the dust in the road, the trees rustled; he slackened his pace, feeling suddenly tired, and very hot.

"It's ridiculous," he told himself. "I shouldn't take it so seriously. No one ought to mind an accusation when it has no foundation at all. To tell me I 'hate' Josephine . . . Simply ridiculous. Of course, I'm no Romeo. I'm not the kind of man for one of those 'grand passions.' I'm too practical. But I'm as fond of Josephine as I've ever been of any woman in my life. She has her faults—but who hasn't? What's more, she's fond of me. Very. It's—it's an insane thing to say that I . . . That she knows I . . ."

Something came into his mind, which made his blue eyes dilate. "You looked stealthy and horrible!" she had said, that morning. "You looked like—"

Like what? What had she been going to say?

"My God!" he said to himself, in a whisper.

CHAPTER III

THE LUFFS

DELANCEY had missed his usual train, and the one after it; the people waiting on the platform were strangers to him, not those well-known faces he was accustomed to seeing six days a week. But they were ordinary, decent, comprehensible people; he felt a great good-will toward them;

he felt the relief of one waking from a nightmare to familiar surroundings. And he felt, too, the vague terror that a nightmare leaves.

"Whew!" he said to himself. "That was a—very unpleasant experience. . . . But fantastic, of course."

The word pleased him.

"Fantastic," he repeated to himself, as he boarded the train.

It seemed to dispose in a thoroughly satisfactory fashion of poor Whitestone and all he had said, it gave to the scene in the birch glade an air of unreality. The real world was this, the train, the crowds, the Grand Central Station, the subway, his desk at the office, the amiable stenographer who worked for him when he needed her.

He did not need her this morning; his business was not brisk.

"I'm going to look around for something else," he thought. "A regular job with a salary."

He had mentioned this once or twice to Josephine, and she had protested.

"Oh, don't, Shawe! It's so nice for you to have your own business. I'd hate to think of your working for someone else—being at someone's beck and call."

Very generous, she was. He had his own bank account, in which she deposited a cheque the first of every month. She never asked what he did with it, and if he said he needed a bit more, for his business, she almost always gave it. Almost always. Sometimes, when he least expected it, she would make extraordinary accusations against him, would say she knew he wanted the money to spend on some other woman. . . . Of course, she had her faults, like everyone else. He had faults himself. But, with the exception of a little scene now and then. . . . Simply nerves. . . . She was a high-strung girl, poor Josephine. . . . Well, not exactly a girl, perhaps. She admitted to being five years older than he, and sometimes he had a suspicion that it was a bit more than that. When she waked in the morning, there was a look about her eyes . . .

He wished he had not thought of that. He always tried to avoid looking at her until she had removed her "night

cream" and applied those "toning lotions" and so on.

Suddenly he felt rather sick.

"That damned cheese soufflé last night," he thought. "I need a drink."

He was very temperate by habit; he never drank in the morning; he could not remember ever wanting a drink as he did now. He opened a perfectly unimportant letter, frowned at it, and rose, with a purposeful air.

"I'll have to see this man at once," he observed, aloud, for the benefit of the stenographer, and taking his hat, went out of the office.

It did him good. He ordered another. Nearly eleven. If he was to get home for lunch, he ought to catch the 12:24. He didn't want to get home for lunch. Well, nothing remarkable in that. Plenty of men he knew, men who appreciated their homes as much as he did, nevertheless liked to stop in town now and then. He might ring up Foster, or Duval. He might go to the club.

"No," he decided. "Josephine was a bit upset this morning. I'd better go home, this time."

Linney was waiting for him at the station, smart looking fellow in that uniform; the car, too, was one of the finest; these men with their shabby little coupés must envy him. There was a rush for the waiting taxis; never enough of them. One young man got left; he stood on the platform, with his bag beside him, and glanced at his watch.

"Hold on a moment Linney!" said Delancey, and leaning out of his car, addressed the stranger. "See here, going north? Perhaps I can give you a lift."

He often did that, and liked to do it.

"Sorry, but I don't know whether it's north or not," answered the stranger. "I'm going to Mrs. Luff's—if you happen to know where that is."

"That's right on my way! Hop in!"

"Thanks!" said the stranger, gave his bag to Linney, and got in beside Delancey. He was a neat, fair-haired young fellow, slight, rather short, quietly dressed, quiet in voice, yet there was something about him which made Delancey anxious to impress him.

"Fine place the Luffs have," he observed.

"Is it?" said the other politely.

"Yes. . . . They're neighbours of ours, you know. Delancey, my name is. Shawe Delancey."

"My name's Acheson."

"Acheson. . . ." Delancey repeated. "Yes. . . . Fine place the Luffs have. Quite an estate. Our place isn't half the size, but my wife's a great gardener. I wish you could see—"

He stopped, with an odd look on his ruddy face. The thought had entered his mind, and would not be banished, that he would not like this quiet young man to meet Josephine.

"Most men of my age have younger wives," he thought. "Girls. . . ."

Then he recalled that this was Josephine's car, and that she was generous to him.

"She's a fine-looking woman, too," he thought. "And she knows how to dress. I mean to say, Mrs. Luff's like a rag-bag, compared to Josephine."

He liked Mrs. Luff very much, though; he greatly regretted that Josephine did not get on with her. When they had first come here, the Luffs had been remarkably nice, had invited them to dinner, had been friendly in a fashion he had never before encountered. With honest humility he admitted to himself that the Luffs were "a cut above him," and above Josephine, too. Their way of living, their simplicity, their ease, the atmosphere of careless comfort in their house, seemed to him about the best thing there could be. He would have liked to live like them; he would have liked to *be* like them.

"Drive right up to the Luffs' house, Linney," he said.

For, after all, he had not quarreled with the Luffs; he didn't even know exactly what had gone amiss between Josephine and Mrs. Luff. Whenever he met Luff, at the railway station, or on the train, they always chatted together. There was no reason why he should not take this young man to the door; and if he happened to see Mrs. Luff, well, he wouldn't be sorry for a chance to say a few friendly words to her. That would be no offense against Josephine.

"Fact is," he thought, "I believe Josephine's sorry now.

I believe she'd be glad of an excuse to patch things up with Mrs. Luff. She lets her nerves get the better of her."

His heart quickened a little, to see Mrs. Luff on the terrace. He had always admired that terrace, with the striped awning over it, the comfortable chairs and little tables.

"Suppose she—snubs me?" he thought, and he imagined her speaking with the haughty arrogance he had heard Josephine employ toward the presumptuous.

Mrs. Luff rose as the car stopped, and came to the head of the steps.

"Hugh!" she said. "I'm so glad. . . . And Mr. Delancey. . . . How nice!"

Her husband had come to her side.

"Delancey . . ." he said. "Come up and have a drink?"

Delancey was delighted with this welcome; he mounted the steps, smiling joyously.

"Elsie, dear," said Mrs. Luff. "Mr. Delancey, Miss Sackett. . . . And I forgot—you don't know Hugh Acheson, either."

It was the girl he had seen in the garden that morning, the girl Whitestone said he loved. . . . She was wearing a sleeveless white dress that made her olive skin seem darker; her face was exquisite, great black eyes, soft and sombre, a wide and sullen and beautiful mouth. She was very young, and her manner was not amiable, yet, for all her immaturity and her lack of graciousness, Delancey knew that she was something rare. Without being at all able to define it, he nevertheless knew that here was the sorcery that men have died for since the beginning of things.

"Poor Robert . . ." he thought, with a pang. "Poor devil!"

For what could this lovely girl find to please her in the bitter and moody Whitestone, a man certainly ten years older than she, and a married man, too? Yet, if Whitestone's heart had once turned to her, how could he ever forget . . . ? Poor devil!

A parlour-maid brought out whiskey and a syphon of soda on a tray; Luff held out his cigarette case; there was the friendliest air. But for once Delancey's cheerful talk deserted him; he felt unhappy, desolate, and did not under-

stand why. Only that somehow this was the right life; somehow Luff, lean and amiably taciturn, Mrs. Luff in her debonair dowdiness, the quiet young Acheson, the unforgettable Elsie, were the right people, whom he had been longing for, without knowing it. And he couldn't stay here, couldn't ever get back here once he had left.

He sipped his drink slowly; when anyone spoke to him he answered, and that was the best he could do. He wanted to make this moment last.

"You'll stay to lunch, won't you?" asked Mrs. Luff, and he came to, with a slight start.

"Why, thank you," he answered. "I'd certainly like to, but my wife's expecting me home. . . ."

He had to go now, and go forever. Mrs. Luff would simply not be interested in "patching things up" with Josephine.

"It was all Josephine's fault, whatever it was," he thought. "Must have been. Mrs. Luff wouldn't quarrel with people. She must think Josephine is—"

The word came to his mind; it was as if he had heard Mrs. Luff say, in her lazy, pleasant voice—"impossible." That must be what all their neighbours called Josephine. The impossible Mrs. Delancey. . . .

He got into the superb dark-blue car, and he was ashamed of it. He was ashamed of his own bigness, his hearty voice; he sat back in a corner, thoroughly miserable.

"It's no use," he said to himself, over and over. "It's no use."

And did not know what he meant by that, or why he was so unhappy. As his own house came in sight he pulled himself together, tried to shake off his depression. It was really a fine house, Colonial style, big white pillars, well-kept grounds. . . . The housemaid smiled at him when she opened the door.

"Shawe!" called his wife's voice, imperiously.

She was lying on a couch in the library, tall, looking very slight in a black lace tea gown, with long jade earrings, her olive face powdered, her lips scarlet, her black hair drawn straight back from her forehead. He had seen her before in this same costume, and in this same pose, and he had admired her. "Cleopatra," he had called her.

He did not admire her now. In his mind, he envisaged her on the Luffs' terrace, in the sunlight. He contrasted her low, thrilling voice with Mrs. Luff's clear one; her heavy perfume made him think with nostalgia of the clean scent of cut grass. He thought of that girl Elsie, who was dark and slender, like Josephine, but who was really young. And he felt an overwhelming pity for Josephine.

"Well, Cleopatra!" he said, and crossed the room to kiss her.

"Shawe!" she said, curtly. "Where have you been?"

It would never do to mention the Luffs to her, especially when she was in this mood.

"The train was a little late—" he said.

"That's a lie!"

"Now, see here, Josephine! That's not—"

"It's a lie!" she repeated. "Alice Hampton got the same train as you. She told me she saw you. And she stopped in here twenty minutes ago. You've been *somewhere* for that twenty minutes."

"My dear girl, look here! I ran into a fellow I know, down at the station, and we talked for a while. Naturally, I didn't keep track of the minutes—"

"No!" she said. "It's that girl."

"Good Lord! *What* girl?"

"I heard about it last week, but I tried not to believe it. Someone told me that that girl who's staying at the Luffs' was running after a married man in this neighbourhood, and by the way she said it, I felt it was you she meant. . . ."

"Good Lord!" he said, again. "When you say things like that—what can I answer?"

"The truth—if you're capable of it."

"All right, then. Here's the truth. I've never spoken ten words to Miss Sackett—"

"So you know her name!" cried Josephine, sitting up. "You admit then that you know her!"

"Luff happened to introduce us—at the station," he said, for now, less than ever, could he mention his visit to the Luffs' house.

"It must have been a regular little reception at the station," she said, with a sneer.

"Now, see here, my dear girl . . . ! You're working yourself up over nothing. Absolutely nothing. Other women don't interest me—none of 'em—"

"Do you think I'm blind, or a fool? Do you think I haven't noticed the way you look at Annie, my own servant?"

He felt no anger against her, only an immense boredom. These scenes had happened before; she made herself ill by them, by her wildly unreasonable jealousy. He had never been unfaithful to her, or even contemplated such a thing, but he could not convince her of that. The only way to end these miserable episodes was by making love to her, flattering her, letting her "forgive" him—for what he had not done.

"Don't you ever look in the mirror?" he said. "Well, then, do you imagine that a man with a wife like *you*—"

"You needn't try that," she interrupted. "I've listened to you once too often. You've seen the girl once to-day, and you planned to see her again. Your precious Robert Whitestone's wife rang up. 'You'll both come to dinner to-night, won't you? A little party—some friends of Robert's . . .' I could see through *that* without much trouble. Rosalind Whitestone knows perfectly well that I wouldn't set foot in her house. She asked me because Robert bullied her into it. I wasn't expected to come. It was just an excuse for you to get there. Robert's trying to help you, in your nasty, underhand love affair. You were going to tell me you were dining with them, and you were really going to meet that girl somewhere."

"Josephine, you're—" he began, and stopped. It occurred to him that, in defending himself, he might incriminate Robert. He would have to be careful—and with the alarming insight women had, Josephine might very well discern that he was being careful. That would make it worse.

"You're making a mountain out of a molehill," he said, in a soothing, reasonable tone. "I saw Robert this morning, and he spoke of our both coming to dinner."

"Well, I'm not going, and you're not going either," she said.

He was still not angry, and he was aware of the necessity for caution, on Robert's account, yet he felt that this domi-

neering spirit in her must not be encouraged.

"I want to go," he said, amiable but firm. "And I want you to come too. Wear that new dress—the brown lace, y'know. Rosalind likes you, and if you knew her better—"

"Likes me, does she? Just about as much as I like her. I'm not going, and neither are you."

Their eyes met, and now he felt anger rising in his heart.

"Hold on!" he said to himself. "Keep cool."

He waited a moment; then he said, mildly,

"All right; if you don't want to go . . . I'll call up Robert and tell him I'll run over later in the evening for half an hour or so. Fact is, I'm worried about Robert. I don't think he's well."

"You're not going there this evening."

The smouldering anger in him was growing, and he feared it. He was so seldom angry.

"I will not have a scene with her," he thought. "We've never had a really serious row yet, and I don't intend—"

"I told Robert you weren't coming," she went on. "What's more, you've got to give up Robert entirely. He does you nothing but harm. Every time, after you've seen him—"

"You're going entirely too far!" said Delancey hotly. "I'm not going to give up an old friend, for some whim of yours. I intend—"

"Then you'd better hear what *I* intend to do," she said. "I'm going to tell Linney you're not to use the car. I'm going to stop making any deposits to your account—"

"What the devil's the matter with you?" he shouted. "You ought to be ashamed—"

"You're not going to use my money, and my car, to carry on with girls! I've had enough! The affair is getting to be common gossip—you and that girl. And Robert helps you! He's always ~~hated~~ me—"

Delancey turned on his heel, and walked out of the room, out of the house. And he walked as if the devil were after him. Anger goaded him, seemed to gnaw at the foundation of his amiable, easy-going nature.

"She was talking at the top of her lungs," he thought. "The servants must have heard her. Accusing me of making eyes at the housemaid. . . . And running after that girl over

at the Luffs'. . . It's enough to *make* me unfaithful, all this disgusting suspicion. . . And if she hadn't flown at me the way she did, I shouldn't have needed to lie about stopping in at the Luffs'. We could have had them for friends. . . But she won't be friendly with anyone. She doesn't know what loyalty and friendship mean. . . Give up Robert entirely. . . The hell I will!"

All the time he was aware of something else, some other cause for anger against Josephine, so bitter and savage that he could not face it.

"She said a lot of things she didn't mean," he told himself.

He felt that his anger was a menace, a danger, and he made a determined effort to banish it. After a mile or so, he grew calmer, and he grew hungry. He stopped at a roadhouse and had lunch, a good lunch, and a highball. After he had finished, and smoked a cigar, he was no longer angry.

"Don't know when I've enjoyed a meal more," he thought.

It was after three now, and he contemplated the rest of the afternoon with uneasiness. He had forgiven Josephine, but he did not want to go back to her.

"No," he thought. "Better give her a chance to realize . . ."

In the three years of their married life, he had never yet stayed away without telling her where he was. Sometimes what he had told her had been a lie, when he had wanted to sit in a game of poker, or to spend an evening with Robert, but harmless lies like that did not weigh upon his conscience. This time he would tell her nothing.

"She really did go too far," he thought. "I mean to say, a man can't let himself be—well—trampled on. I'll go—"

He would go to Robert's, and he would tell her that he had gone there. That, after all, would be the best course, to tell her in a quiet, good-humoured way that would make her realize he meant to keep his independence.

He took a taxi to Whitestone's cottage, and kept the cab waiting. He was very reluctant to enter; he dreaded the prospect of facing Rosalind, after Whitestone's deplorable outburst.

"Not that it really meant anything," he said to himself. "Pretty nearly all married couples have a row, now and

then. The thing has probably all blown over now, and they're happy again."

Nevertheless, he didn't want to see Rosalind just now if he could help it.

"I'll take Robert up to the Country Club," he thought. "It'll do him good. We'll have a couple of drinks. . . ."

He was relieved to find Whitestone smoking a pipe on one of the wooden settles built into the narrow porch.

"Hello, Robert!" he said, genially. "Just taking life easy, eh?"

"Oh. . . . Planning . . ." answered Whitestone.

"Planning a picture? Well, come on, old man! I'll run you up—"

"No," said Whitestone. "You remember what I told you this morning? There are still a few little details to work out. Because I'm going to do it tomorrow, if the weather's good."

Rosalind's voice came from inside the house, gay and light.

"What are you two doing out there?"

"Talking about you, my dear," said Whitestone.

CHAPTER IV

ROSALIND'S DINNER PARTY

HUGH ACHESON sat in his room, looking out of the window, and considering the situation.

It was a situation very familiar to him. How many times had he arrived at a house, and found there a girl—invited only on his account . . . !

This seemed to him a wrong and unfortunate thing; he always felt apologetic toward these girls, charming girls, pretty, well-bred, intelligent, altogether suitable; he liked them all—but never quite enough. Not one of them had that quality, which he could not have defined, or named, yet which was to him indispensable. Sometimes he had a glimpse of it in a play, an opera; Isolde had it, and Mary of Scotland; he could believe that there had once been wom-

en in the world who had that tragic and passionate magnificence. But he had lived for twenty-seven years without encountering it in actual life, and the girls he met seemed to him, all of them, a little insipid.

Mrs. Luff's new protégée rather surprised him, although in his eyes Anabel Luff could do no wrong. She had been a friend of his mother's, and ever since his schooldays he had felt for her an affection and respect he accorded to no one else. If she were so fond of this silent and almost sullen girl, then there must be something admirable in her which he had not yet discerned.

"Her father was Foxe Sackett, you know!" Mrs. Luff had told him, and seeing by his face that the name meant nothing to him: "The musician," she had added. "A composer. . . . He was really famous, in musical circles. And Elsie plays marvelously, and she's beautiful, don't you think, Hugh?"

"Oh, very!" he had answered, politely.

He sighed now, thinking of Elsie. His chivalrous attitude toward woman was a burden to him; he could not help being deferential to them. He could not let Anabel Luff suspect how little interest he felt in her Elsie; he could not let her know how reluctant he was to go to dinner to-night with this artist fellow. Mrs. Luff enjoyed the society of artists, but Hugh didn't. He admired them, of course; no doubt it was necessary for pictures to be painted, music and books to be written, and so on, but the people who did these things were trying. He did not know how to talk to them. What he understood and liked best were riding, hunting, polo, flying, sailing; he liked to be active physically. To-night, he would probably have to look at this fellow's pictures, and say something. . . .

With another sigh, he rose and began to dress. Dressing was one of the many things he knew how to do well. He was extremely fastidious; his dinner-jacket was a marvel, his trousers were a work of art. Slender, fair-haired, boyish in appearance, he had none the less a sort of dignity about him; he was easy, friendly, polite, but no one took liberties with him.

Anabel was waiting in the hall for him. Her black evening

dress did not fit very well; her sandy hair was untidy, as usual, but she was privileged to look like that; she was beyond criticism. Luff was with her, wooden and immaculate.

"We'll have cocktails before we go," he said. "Whitestone's liquor is . . . Well, Anabel's responsible for this."

"Robert Whitestone's quite charming," said Mrs. Luff, firmly. "And very talented."

"But he doesn't do anything!" her husband objected. "I mean—after all—how d'you know he's talented? Never has any pictures to show."

"If you'd ever seen him at work," said Mrs. Luff, "in an awful little sort of summer-house, full of spiders, and wearing a smock, and his hair ruffled . . ."

Her husband and young Acheson both smiled with immeasurable indulgence. Anabel Luff was past fifty, there was grey in her hair, but she would always be able to evoke in men that tender amusement.

"You'll see yourself—" she began, and stopped, looking toward the staircase. Elsie was coming down, in a long white evening frock, a rose-coloured ribbon about her dark hair; her appearance was unusual, and as a rule Hugh Acheson disliked any sort of eccentricity. But this girl, he thought, was like some portrait in a gallery, fragile, immature, touchingly lovely.

"You won't want a cocktail, dear . . . ?" said Mrs. Luff.

"I do, please."

"It's not good for your complexion—"

"I need one!" Elsie said vehemently.

This seemed to Hugh in poor taste. A kid of her age had no business to "need" a drink.

"Neurotic," he said to himself.

He did not know definitely what that word meant, but he did know what it connoted for him. It signified too much smoking, and too little fresh air, too much emotion, and too little exercise. He was sorry to see her swallow a cocktail almost at a gulp, and hold out her glass for another. For she was authentically young, not more than eighteen or nineteen, he decided, and her youth was exquisite.

She had been badly brought up, though, or else she was bad-tempered. As he sat beside her in the car, he made two

or three attempts to talk to her as he talked to other girls, without getting anything better than the curtest possible retorts. So he let her alone.

The Whitestones' house was worse than he had expected, shabbier and smaller; something queer in the atmosphere, too. Whitestone was silent and distraught; Mrs. Whitestone was too gay. Moreover, it made Hugh uncomfortable to be waited upon by his hostess; he found it embarrassing to sit at the table while she hurried back and forth. He wanted to help her, but she would not allow that, wouldn't even let her husband help her.

"But you've hurt your hand, Mrs. Whitestone!" Hugh protested, observing a bandage about her fingers.

"It's nothing," she assured him, smiling. "Just a tiny burn."

She could not suppress the other man, though, that Delancey whom Hugh had met earlier in the day. Delancey seemed very much at home here, jumping up from the table, going in and out of the kitchen, making good-humoured and somewhat pointless jokes. He carried it off very well, but Hugh saw. . . .

It was perhaps because he so seldom read anything, because his thoughts were so largely occupied by sports and more or less impersonal matters, that Hugh Acheson had so great a power of observation. He observed, and he understood, only by the light of his own experiences. There were no other people's ideas in his head. He was that rare creature, a truly independent human being. Moreover, his active and temperate life had sharpened his senses; he had almost the accuracy, the quickness of a savage, and he never thought of doubting his own conclusions. He simply didn't make mistakes.

"Something wrong here . . ." he thought.

There was something wrong with Delancey, and with Elsie, and with Mrs. Whitestone, and something very wrong indeed with Robert Whitestone.

"That fellow's in hell," thought Hugh, soberly.

Mrs. Whitestone was talking with animation to the polite and unresponsive Luff; Mrs. Luff and Delancey were very cheerful together, and Elsie and Whitestone obviously had

no desire and no intention of talking at all, so Hugh thought himself justified in keeping silent, and trying to understand this situation. His quiet grey eyes never seemed to watch; his boyish face never revealed that he was listening, but he saw, and he heard, and every nerve in his alert, hardy body was conveying impressions to him.

Somehow, it was Delancey who interested him most. Beneath that genial air was a strained uneasiness; he kept glancing from Whitestone to Mrs. Whitestone.

"Is he in love with Mrs. Whitestone?" thought Hugh.

He decided not. He had seen plenty of fellows in love, and they had not been like this.

"No," he thought. "He's afraid of something."

Fear, he reflected, was the one emotion that could not be concealed. Hate, love, even pain could be disguised, but not fear, that first great primeval passion and driver of men. At the hangar, at sea in a storm, Hugh had seen men afraid; he knew what that side-long look, that overheartly laugh meant.

"Why?" he thought. "What's he afraid of? Whitestone? Mrs. Whitestone? Is it blackmail?"

He was well enough acquainted with the less creditable aspects of life; on one occasion an attempt had been made—unsuccessfully—to blackmail him. He knew that such things happened, and he was neither unduly shocked nor distressed about them. He turned this idea over in his head. But whatever was afoot, he decided, the Whitestones were not acting in concert; there was no harmony between them. Mrs. Whitestone wasn't afraid of anything; he felt sure of that. The flush in her cheeks, the forced gaiety of her manner were caused by anger. That was how women behaved when they were angry. And she had cause for irritation, with her husband sitting there silent and haggard, eating none of the excellent dinner she had prepared. She couldn't feel much good-will toward Elsie, either; the girl did not make the slightest effort to do her duty as a guest; never even glanced at her hostess.

"The kid's miserable," he thought. "And so is Whitestone."

That gave him another idea, and a most unwelcome one, but one that persisted. As always, he fell back upon his

own experience, recalling what he himself had seen or heard, and he could not call his idea impossible, or even improbable. Elsie would not be the first poor little fool to entangle herself in a disastrous love affair of this sort, or the last. It happened all the time. And it fitted. It explained her sullen mood, and Whitestone's morose and distrait silence, and Mrs. Whitestone's anger.

But it left out Delancey's fear.

"I don't see . . ." thought Hugh.

He wanted to see, on Elsie's account, because Anabel Luff was fond of the girl, and because she was so young. He did not want to witness any disaster to her, and he was troubled by the possibility. For, by some sixth sense, which he trusted implicitly, he felt that there was something atrocious overshadowing this cottage.

Mrs. Whitestone, with no servant, and very little money, and, he suspected, very little social training, had however an undeniable social talent; she was the sort of woman, he thought, who could have married a man in a far more exalted position and managed well for him. He didn't like her; he saw her as insincere, vain, and superficial, but he admired her for the valour of that dinner, well-cooked, well-served, if a little over-elaborate. And he pitied her, too, because it was so unsuccessful. She served wine, and that was one thing she did not understand; no one but Delancey drank it. The conversation grew more and more desultory; Mrs. Luff tried in vain to aid her. . . .

Whitestone laughed abruptly, at nothing.

"I've got some whiskey that's really fit to drink," he said, and pushing back his chair, went out of the room.

Delancey rose too, and with an inaudible excuse, followed his friend, through a swing-door that led to the pantry. The door fitted badly; from his end of the table, Hugh heard that hearty voice, subdued to an anxious murmur.

"Now, Robert, see here . . . ! Pull yourself together, old man! I mean to say—with guests in your house—"

"I'll be fine in a little while," Whitestone answered. "I'm going to get drunk."

Mrs. Whitestone had taken Mrs. Luff and Elsie into the sitting-room; Luff sat staring at his glass of wine with

gloomy intentness. . . . Hugh's ethical code was artless as a schoolboy's, but rigid. He considered eavesdropping a discreditable thing, so, much as he wanted to hear more of that conversation in the pantry, he addressed a remark to Luff. Luff, though, was slow in answering, and in the interval, Hugh heard Delancey speak again.

"Oh, shut up about your plan!" he cried, and there was a note in his voice that disturbed the listener. "I know you're only talking through your hat. I know it's simply dam' nonsense—but I don't like it."

"Ah . . . !" said Luff, at last. "Well, I shouldn't be inclined to back Weyman too heavily. . . . Seems to me . . ."

He went on talking, and presently Whitestone re-entered, followed by his friend. Luff and Hugh accepted his whiskey; they praised it politely, but a curious uneasiness possessed them all. Even Luff was restless.

They went, presently, into the sitting-room, and it was better there.

"Mrs. Luff does that," thought Hugh.

He had seen her do it before. Once away from the disturbing influence of Whitestone's moody silence and Delancey's forced geniality, her own influence had made itself felt, her cool, light gaiety, her effortless good-humour. Mrs. Whitestone was more tranquil now, Elsie less sombre, and when the four men entered, they too were changed. Delancey was a little subdued, and Whitestone suddenly became animated. It might have been the whiskey, but whatever the cause, he showed a quick, biting wit that was close to brilliancy. For the first time Hugh could see that Whitestone had a certain charm; he was handsome in his fashion, he was clever, and he was appealing. He had the air of a man who laughs in despair. "That's what gets women," thought Hugh, and glanced at Elsie.

Her beauty dazzled him. Her dark eyes were soft and shining, her lips were parted in a half smile as she listened to Whitestone. She was enthralled, rapt. And Mrs. Whitestone was watching her.

"Lord!" thought Hugh. "This won't do. . . ."

"Robert, dear," said Mrs. Whitestone. "Won't you bring in some of your work? I'm sure—"

"Please!" said Mrs. Luff. "Have you finished that one of the bridge in the twilight, Mr. Whitestone?"

"He hasn't!" said Rosalind, laughing. "He *won't* finish things. I wish you could make him, Mrs. Luff. He's such a provoking boy. All these—"

"He'll do something big, one of these days," Delancey interrupted, so hastily, so loudly as to startle the others. "Thing is, with an artist . . . You've got to let 'em alone. I mean, they've got to work things out their own way. One of these days Robert'll do a picture that'll surprise all of us. The fellow he used to study with—can't think of his name just now—I remember he said Robert was the most promising pupil he had. And you've got to remember Robert won a scholarship in that art school. I mean, all that shows he's got it in him."

It was difficult, even for Anabel Luff, to find anything to say after this vehement outburst; but, after a brief and embarrassed silence, she did speak.

"But we all feel sure of that, Mr. Delancey! You've no idea. . . . I use Mr. Whitestone as a decoy. I ask people down to meet our artist."

"Please do!" entreated Rosalind. "What Robert needs is more encouragement. Of course, what I say doesn't count. He can't help feeling that I'm prejudiced—"

"My dear girl," interrupted Whitestone. He rose and lit a cigarette, with a very unsteady hand. "My dear girl—on the contrary! I never forget the things you've said. I can assure everyone that I'd never be where I am, if it hadn't been for you."

It seemed to Hugh astounding that Mrs. Whitestone didn't see. . . . Mrs. Luff began to talk again, Delancey responded to her. No one seemed to have understood that note in Whitestone's voice, the look on his face.

Hugh himself was so disturbed that Mrs. Luff's move to go home was a great relief to him. He wanted to think over all this, in quiet. They went out to the car, the Whitestones standing silhouetted in their lighted doorway. Luff was helping his wife in, when Elsie touched Hugh's sleeve. He turned quickly.

"I'd like to speak to you," she said, in a whisper.

"Now?" he asked. "Shall we walk?"

"No. I'd rather—I'll come to your room after they've gone to bed," she said, and got into the car.

CHAPTER V

IN THE GRAND MANNER

NOT yet in his life had Hugh Acheson misunderstood a woman. It was impossible for him not to know that he was an extremely eligible young man whom girls wanted to marry; he had also met with married women who wanted him to be publicly, obviously devoted to them. But he accepted all this impersonally and without vanity. When he was liked for his own sake, he knew it. And when he was not liked, he knew it too.

He had known from the beginning that Elsie Sackett did not like him, and that if she wished to see him now it was not for his beaux yeux.

That didn't disturb him. He was sorry for her, and if she wanted anything from him she would probably get it. He found waiting for her a wearisome affair though; he had got up early that morning, he had ridden in the Park, there had been a difficult and delicate meeting of the Board of which he was secretary, and now he was sleepy. He yawned and yawned, leaning back in his chair, yet he felt it would be incorrect to change his dinner-jacket for a dressing-gown. He put his feet up on another chair, and smoked a cigarette and yawned and looked at his watch. Nearly midnight.

"Regular kid's trick . . ." he thought. "We could so easily have walked back from the Whitestones' and got this over with."

He remembered another night, a year or so ago, at his aunt's house. One of the girls there, a house-guest, had told him during the last dance that she was "starving." He had offered to get something for her to eat, but that wouldn't do.

"I'll knock at your door later, when they're all in bed," she had said. "And we'll go down and raid the ice box."

He remembered that girl's gay, eager little face; not her

name, though. It was the memory of her adventurous young happiness that remained. He had kissed her while they sat side by side on the kitchen table, and she had accepted the kiss with an air of indulgent nonchalance. But it had added to her happiness. She had felt herself to be desirable and lovely.

That was how Elsie ought to be, and he did not know if it were her misfortune or her fault that she was not. She had none of the charming self-confidence of a pretty young girl, no coquetry. Yet she was not incapable of emotion. That look she had given Whitestone was a look of adoration. She might, of course, be simply imagining this thing, making a drama out of it, but on the other hand, she might be seriously in love with him, and it was a bad job either way. Whitestone was unstable, not a man to trust with any woman's life.

"And he hates his wife," thought Hugh. "He's not just irritated, or bored with her. He hates her. That's a damned ugly thing. I can see that she might be pretty hard to bear, but he could get out, get away from her—not stay and hate her. There's going to be trouble in that quarter, and if someone doesn't stop it, Elsie's likely to be mixed up in it."

A knock at the door brought him to his feet, and he opened the door for her. She passed him without a smile, or a word of greeting, and as he closed the door she sat down in a high-backed armchair. She looked somehow different, taller, almost august, with the gleaming white dress in folds about her feet, her fragile arms extended on the arms of the chair, her dark-browed face pale.

"You'll think I'm horrible," she said, curtly.

"I don't think so now," he answered, with a smile.

"I shan't even try to explain," she went on. "I can't help what you think. I'd never have come to you if I hadn't been—desperate."

"I'm glad you came to me, if I can help you."

"You can," she said. "But there's no reason why you should."

He made no answer to that. He had received her courteously, he had behaved as well as he knew and she had been, from the first moment, challenging, even hostile. He stood before her now, and waited for her to continue. It was obviously difficult for her.

"I want to ask you if you'll lend me a thousand dollars," she said.

He did not show the surprise he felt.

"Will you smoke?" he said, offering her his cigarette case. "While we talk things over?"

"No," she said. "There's nothing to talk over. Either you're willing to lend me this money or you're not."

Now for the first time he admired her. There was something magnificent in her arrogance, something splendid in her self-control. For she was close to the breaking point. He could see that in her pallor, in the set of her mouth, by the faint unsteadiness of her voice.

"As I told you," he said, "I'll be very glad to help you in any way I can."

"You mean you'll lend me the money?"

He lit a cigarette, and in the moment it took to do that, he made up his mind in his own quick, clear fashion. She had said she was "desperate," and he believed that. He believed that if she did not get what she asked from him, she would surely make other and possibly disastrous attempts elsewhere. She would be humiliated and angered by a refusal, but not daunted. Not she!

"Yes," he said. "With pleasure."

That was almost too much for her. Her lip trembled, she turned away her head for an instant. But then she turned back to him and though tears shone in her eyes, they met his steadily.

"Thank you," she said. "I . . . Will it be all right if I don't pay it back for six months?"

"Perfectly all right."

She rose.

"May I have it now?" she asked.

Magnificent was undoubtedly the word for her! She considered the transaction finished, but he did not. He meant to find out what she wanted the money for, and he meant to protect her from the folly he suspected.

"Sit down, won't you," he said, "while I write a cheque? And do you want to deposit it or shall I certify it?"

Evidently she didn't understand that; her dark brows drew together in a faint frown.

"Can't I just get the money for it?" she asked.

"If you're known at the bank."

She sat down again, and reflected.

"I didn't know about that," she said. "I've never had a cheque."

His admiration for her increased still further; not before in his life had he encountered such directness. Never had had a cheque . . . ?

A soft breeze blew in at the open window, stirring her dark hair with the rose-coloured ribbon about it.

"Mrs. Luff told me your father was a musician," Hugh said, tentatively. He wanted to make her talk.

"He was," she said. "He was a genius. And he was never appreciated. His life was miserable and dreadful."

"Bad lead," thought Hugh. "I suppose Whitestone's another unappreciated genius. Are you going to study music or take up a musical career?" he asked aloud, not quite sure of the right phrase to use in this subject so entirely outside his experience.

"No," she said. "I don't know exactly what I'll do."

"I hope I'll hear you play tomorrow."

"No," she said again. "I don't practice any more. I live with my aunt, and she hates it."

"Hates music?"

"Yes. She's very poor and her one ambition is for me to live a life like *this*. I'd rather be dead."

"Like this?" he asked, puzzled.

"Week ends and tennis and dancing," she said. "I hate tennis and I'm a horrible dancer. And I don't care about clothes, and things like that. When father was alive, he wouldn't bother with people who weren't interesting. I hardly ever met people who weren't artists of some sort."

"Lord!" thought Hugh.

"Money doesn't matter to me," she went on. "It never has. I don't even want money—" She stopped, a little disconcerted. "I mean . . ." she said, ". . . for the usual things. It's—this happens to be an emergency."

"I understand," he assured her.

"I'd better go now," she said. "Mrs. Luff would be shocked, if she knew I'd come here."

Hugh was quite certain that Mrs. Luff would be no more shocked than he was himself. But if she liked to feel that she was affronting bourgeois prejudices. . . . He took out his cheque-book and his fountain pen.

He was canny about money; he had been trained to be so. He was more careful than were friends of his who had not a tenth what he had. He was generous, invariably, but his generosity was never slipshod or rash. And he was not reckless or unthinking in this instance. He was taking a risk, with his eyes open.

She could not cash the cheque until Monday morning, and he hoped that during the Sunday they would spend under the same roof, he would find out what she meant to do with it. If she planned something to her own great disadvantage—and he believed she did—he intended to talk to her, or to Mrs. Luff, or to Whitestone. He was very well aware that he might not be able to dissuade her, and that his money might serve only to hasten a castastrophe. That was the chance he took.

When she had gone, he still sat there, thinking over the episode, to see if he could have managed it better. He didn't see how he could have done better or differently. She had come to him defiant, painfully keyed up to make her outrageous request. If he had shown no sympathy, or too much, if he had tried to ask her questions, or to dissuade her, she would have left him at once, and gone away "desperate" as she had said.

"No," he thought. "She's well worth taking a little trouble about . . ." He reflected. "I believe . . ." he thought, "that *she's*—one of those women. . . ."

He could not have expressed it in words, but he knew what he meant. He meant that he discovered in her this strange quality of a heroine. If she were a fool, she would be a superb fool. He respected that.

He slept soundly, according to his wont; when he awoke the sun was up and he felt cheerful, lively and hungry.

"I'll find out why she wants the money," he told himself. "I think I know—but I hope I'm wrong. If she wants it for an elopement with that genius—all right! Then I'll interview *him*."

It occurred to him that he was taking a good deal upon himself.

"Being an officious ass, very likely," he thought. "But someone's got to be officious where kids are concerned. You can't just let them alone when they don't realize where they're heading."

Mrs. Luff never came down to breakfast, but in due time Luff appeared.

"Up early," he remarked. "Well . . . !"

They had scarcely sat down at the table when Elsie appeared, dressed in white and entirely too pale. "I think," said Luff, "that I'll teach you to play golf, Elsie."

"I couldn't possibly!" she said. "I'm hopeless at games, and I hate all of them."

"You'd like golf," said Luff with quiet conviction. "Couldn't help it. Fascination about it. You come up to the Country Club with me this morning and just give it a try."

"I really couldn't!" she cried, and both men were a little disconcerted by the vehemence of her protest.

"Some other time, then," said Luff.

"What about a drive?" Hugh suggested. "My car'll be here presently, if it's not here now. Something went wrong with it yesterday, but the chauffeur said he'd be able to run it out this morning."

"Thanks," she said.

He did not know whether she meant yes or no, and he did not like to ask her. She was so pale, obviously so disturbed.

"Why?" he thought. "She was all right when she left me last night. What can have happened in the meantime? Did she see the genius last night?"

She drank a cup of coffee, and left the table.

"Can't understand the girl," said Luff, when she had gone. "Pretty girl. I'm fond of her. But I never could make her out. Anabel's had her here before, and she's always the same. Never wants to *do* anything. Doesn't ride, or swim, or play tennis; doesn't like dancing. Sort of morbid, don't you think? Girl of her age. . . ."

"Well, her father being a musician . . ." said Hugh.

"Ha . . . !" said Luff, gravely. They understood each other perfectly.

Hugh went out presently, to the garage, and there he found his chauffeur waiting, and his car in condition. He drove it to the house and, entering the hall, he found Elsie there, in a black suit and black beret, with a red scarf about her throat, like a handsome young Apache, he thought.

"It's a good day for a drive," he began.

"I'd forgotten it was Sunday!" she cried, with a tone of passionate accusation.

"But—don't you like to drive on Sunday?" he asked.

She went past him out of the door, and he followed; before he could help her, she had got into the roadster.

"I'd forgotten to-day was Sunday!" she said again. "And you didn't remind me!"

"Does it make much difference?"

"Yes! It does!"

He was just starting the car when Luff came along the terrace.

"See here!" he said. "Hugh—Anabel says will you leave this at Delancey's? He left it here yesterday. Must have dropped it. Might want it."

Hugh put the silver cigarette case into his pocket, and set off down the drive.

"If it's something very urgent," he said. "I have a little cash with me."

"How much?" she demanded.

"Not more than fifty dollars, I'm afraid."

"That's no good," she said, and fell silent.

He felt no resentment at this cavalier treatment; glancing covertly at her, he felt only pity for her misery. The time had come when he ought to talk to her, win her confidence, persuade and convince her. Only now in the cool, bright morning, it was more difficult than it had seemed last night. The very fact of her being so young made it worse. If she had been a mature person, with some knowledge of the world, he could have devised an approach; but she was so self-willed, so blunt and naive, she would probably take offense at the first hint of advice. He glanced at her again, and still could not begin.

"How early tomorrow can I get that cheque cashed?" she asked.

He could not afford to miss that cue.

"I've been thinking," he said. "If there's this—emergency—perhaps I could help you in some better way. I'm rather good at practical things."

It was as he had expected. She grew suspicious at once.

"No thanks," she said, with a quick, sidelong glance. "I can manage for myself."

"Look here!" he said. "I don't mean to be meddlesome. It's simply that I'm older than you and I've had more experience. I think that if you'll talk this thing over with me, you'd be glad."

She did not answer at all, but a flaming colour rose in her cheeks. She looked so lovely, so furious, so very young, that he sighed inaudibly.

"You saw for yourself," he went on, "that I was glad to do what you wanted, without any questions."

"You knew to-day would be Sunday. You thought you'd have plenty of time to talk me out of it. You knew I couldn't do anything with the cheque until Monday. . . . I suppose you've told Mrs. Luff."

She opened the purse she carried and brought out the cheque.

"I'll give it back to you," she said. "You never really meant me to have it."

He turned his head, and for a moment their eyes met. And in his steady gaze she saw something that abashed her.

But she could not tolerate that weakness in herself; she would *not* be disconcerted.

"Last night," she said, "I thought you had understanding. I thought you were—rather wonderful about this. But I don't now. Now you want to make me tell you why I want the money. I won't tell you. I'd rather give it back to you."

"There weren't any conditions attached to it," he said, briefly.

"There were. There are. I might have known, from the way Mrs. Luff talked about you. She said you were 'so level-headed.' That means that you couldn't ever have a generous, reckless impulse. Take it back, please!"

"If you don't want it, tear it up," he said. "I'll have to stop here for a moment to return Delancey's cigarette case."

He turned into Delancey's driveway, and there was Delancey himself, sitting in a wicker chair on the veranda, smoking, and reading the Sunday newspaper. He was delighted to see them. He was, Hugh thought, almost pathetically hospitable.

"Sit down for a few moments!" he entreated. "I'll call my wife."

Hugh was pleased that Elsie accepted with a certain graciousness. He realized that he had never felt so uncertain about a fellow-creature as he did about her. If she had turned her back and walked off without a word, it would not have surprised him. But she took the chair Delancey pulled forward, and sat there quietly, hands clasped in her lap, and never glanced at Hugh, until Delancey returned with his wife.

As a naturalist, when finding a new specimen, compares and contrasts it with species already known to him, so did Hugh, when meeting a person for the first time, attempt to relate that person with someone already known to him. He did this unconsciously, because it was his fixed habit to draw only upon his own experience. He looked at Mrs. Delancey, thin, supple, handsome in her somewhat haggard fashion, and he thought—"Jessica!" There was no actual physical resemblance, but in Mrs. Delancey's voice, her smiles, her gestures, he detected his cousin Jessica.

He had been a boy of eighteen at the time of the great Jessica scandal, but he had forgotten nothing of it. He had been alone with her, in her villa at Nice, when she had killed herself. She had been the first person he had ever seen dead; he had not known at first, when he had found her lying on a couch, tall, thin, her black hair elegantly dressed, her handsome face composed, faintly scornful. Only she had not answered, when Hugh reminded her that D'Albert had waited so very long alone in the salon. . . .

Even at eighteen he had understood that *affaire* with an impersonal clarity. It had seemed to him fantastic and distasteful that there should be love between Jessica, a woman of forty and D'Albert at twenty-five. But it had been a genuine passion, and D'Albert had been an ardent and chivalrous lover; he had given her no cause for suspicion or complaint.

Yet she would never trust him, never believe him, would never permit herself to be happy.

And now, in Mrs. Delancey's face, he saw the Jessica look, a look of torment caused not by grief from outside, which the spirit attempts to resist, but a pain bred in the soul, not resisted but fostered, encouraged.

She was a little over-affable to Hugh.

"My father used to know a Mr. Acheson," she said. "The famous millionaire financier, Mr. Bruce Acheson. Is he any relation to you?"

"Er—yes," Hugh answered, with immense reluctance. "My father. . . ."

A blank silence followed, and he felt as if he had been guilty of some horrible breach of good taste.

"The telephone, sir," said the housemaid, and Delancey went into the house.

"My gardener tells me—" Mrs. Delancey began, when her husband's voice reached them from inside.

"What?" he shouted. "What . . . ? Oh, God! . . . No . . . ! Oh, my God . . . !"

Mrs. Delancey rose and Hugh with her. They were all facing the door when Delancey came out. His ruddy face was ghastly, his eyes staring.

"Mrs. Browne telephoned. . . . My God! . . . She says Rosalind's *dead!*"

Hugh caught Elsie as she fell forward out of her chair.

CHAPTER VI

ROSALIND COMES HOME

"**W**HAT's the matter?" cried Delancey, standing by the sofa to which Hugh had carried the unconscious girl. "Merciful Heavens . . . ! I'll send for the doctor."

"I don't think there's any need for that," Hugh answered. "She's fainted, that's all. The news was a bit sudden."

"I'm a clumsy fool!" said Delancey. "I didn't realize."

"If Mrs. Delancey will ring for water, and whatever you have—brandy. . . ."

"Lord . . . !" said Delancey, with a sort of groan, and

turning to see what new trouble there was, Hugh found Mrs. Delancey lying back in a chair with her eyes closed.

"You might give Mrs. Delancey some brandy too," he said, briefly.

He was seriously disturbed about Elsie. Not about her fainting; he had once fainted himself, when having a dislocated arm set; he had seen plenty of people faint and recover. It was her emotion that worried him and her lack of discretion. She might very well say something outrageous when she recovered her senses, and Mrs. Delancey would hear. Mrs. Delancey was not a woman he would have chosen to overhear an indiscretion.

"She could say anything," he thought, looking down at Elsie's white face. "And not necessarily by mistake, either. . . . If she's hurt, she'll hit back and hit hard."

He wet a towel in cold water, and bathed her face, he saw to it that she lay with her head low, and he was confident that she would soon revive. Her dark lashes stirred, a little colour came back to her lips. She looked up directly into his face, with a blank, clear gaze. Then her eyes seemed to darken. She was remembering now. He could not glance away; he was obliged to watch, dawning in her eyes, a black, bitter fury.

She sat up, without a word, and let him support her with his arm about her shoulders while she drank a glass of water.

"I'm going now," she said.

"Hadh'n't you better—?" he began.

"I'm going now," she said, and rose to her feet. Mrs. Delancey still had her eyes closed, but it did not seem to Hugh necessary to display much concern about her.

"I'll take Miss Sackett home now," he said.

Delancey left his wife's side, and hastened to help. He insisted upon holding Elsie's arm as she went down the veranda steps; he almost lifted her into the car.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am I upset you this way," he said. "I might have known what a shock . . ."

Elsie held out her hand to him.

"No," she said. "You're Robert's friend. It's horrible for you. . . . You're going to see him soon, aren't you?"

"I'm going at once. He hasn't been notified yet. I . . .

They want me to break the news. . . ."

"Wait! I didn't know that. Let me go with you, please."

"No!" protested Delancey, shocked. "Wouldn't do at all."

"Then I'll go alone. I'm going to be there when he hears. . . ."

"Better not, Miss Sackett," said Hugh.

She did not take the slightest notice of him.

"Mr. Delancey, please take me with you!" she said.

Delancey was obviously incapable of resisting her, and Hugh saw that any attempt at interference from himself would be worse than useless.

"I'll take you in my car," he said, addressing Delancey. "To his house?"

For with Elsie in this mood, he was not going to let her meet Whitestone with no better support than Delancey, who was more unnerved than she. The fellow was shaking like a leaf as he got into the car.

"How did it happen, Shawe?" asked Elsie.

He looked startled at her use of his name, and perhaps by the gentleness of her tone.

"It's—I can't understand it," he answered. "Naomi Browne said she and Rosalind went down to the beach. They often did that. . . . And Rosalind swam out too far. Naomi missed her after a few moments. . . . But she'd gone. . . ."

"Where did they find the body?" asked Elsie, her eyes narrowed in a curious intensity.

"They haven't. Not yet."

"Mrs. Browne didn't really *see* her go down?"

"No. She just—"

"Then perhaps she's not drowned. Perhaps she swam round the point and came ashore somewhere else."

"Not possible. In the first place, Rosalind wouldn't do a thing like that. She'd know how it would worry Naomi. And even if she had, she'd be *somewhere*. As soon as Naomi missed her, she ran along the beach. Then she went back to the road, and stopped a car that was passing, and the people in it helped her to look. If Rosalind had been there, they couldn't have helped seeing her."

"She might have gone home."

"Walked two miles in her bathing suit? And just left Na-

omi there without a word? No. It's—it's got to be faced. She's gone. They've got people looking for her—along the shore."

"She might have gone home just the same," Elsie insisted, with an obstinacy that interested Hugh.

"She wants Mrs. Whiteside to be alive," he thought. "As Delancey wants to believe she's drowned. I don't quite see—"

With infinite patience and kindliness, Delancey was arguing with the mutinous girl.

"No use clinging to false hopes," he said. "I mean, the thing's got to be faced—"

They were very near the cottage now, and Hugh was aware of a sensation he had known before, a queer and very unpleasant sensation in the solar plexus. So had he felt when his cousin Jessica had not answered him, had not opened her eyes. So had he felt when he had gone to tell the mother of one of his sailboat's crew that her son was not coming home to her. Ever. They were going now to tell Whitestone that his wife was not coming home, ever. And the fact that he had hated her would not soften the blow.

"I'll go first," said Delancey, but when he got out of the car, the girl followed him, and doggedly Hugh followed her. Delancey rang the bell, but no one came; he knocked and no one answered. And this had the most singular effect upon him. His face blanched. He stared at the closed door in undisguised terror.

"But he must be home!" he shouted. "I tell you I know he's home!"

"Maybe he's in the studio," Elsie suggested, and Delancey gave a great sigh of relief.

"Of course!" he said. "I'm a fool to have forgotten that."

Hugh said nothing, but his own face had grown a little pale. For in his terror, Delancey had most completely betrayed himself. What he feared was obvious, and not good to contemplate. If Rosalind were dead, he wanted to be sure that her husband was at home—and had been at home. He too, for all that he was not very quick-witted, or very observant, must have seen what Hugh had seen, that Whitestone hated his wife.

However, Whitestone was in his studio. It was a wretched little sort of summer-house, dusty and untidy, and he sat there in a faded brown smock, before an easel, so absorbed in his work that he did not notice their approach until Delancey spoke.

"Robert, old man—"

He turned, and rose, in polite haste.

"Miss Sackett . . ." he said. "It's nice to see you here."

They all stood facing him, in a blank, wretched silence, and he stared at them with a frown.

"But—what's the matter?" he demanded.

"Robert, old man," said Delancey, in a voice which desperation made over-loud. "Old man, you'll have to—to prepare yourself for a shock."

"Get on with it!" cried Whitestone. "What's happened?"

"Robert . . . Your wife . . . Rosalind's met—with an accident."

Whitestone stared at him.

"She—you know she went swimming this morning with Naomi Browne. . . . Robert, old man—you've got to brace yourself. . . ."

Whitestone turned fiercely on Hugh.

"Acheson!" he said. "Are *you* capable of giving me a coherent account? What's happened to Rosalind?"

"She's missing," Hugh answered in his quiet way.

"Missing? What d'you mean? From where?"

"Mrs. Browne missed her while she was swimming. The shore's been searched but there's no trace of her."

"I'm not going to take Naomi's word for that!" said Whitestone furiously. "She's a fool. I don't believe all this. I'm going there myself. . . . Rosalind's a good swimmer . . . She wouldn't . . . It's impossible. . . ."

He strode out of the summer-house, brushing past the other three as if he were unaware of them.

"I'll drive you," said Hugh.

Whitestone looked back over his shoulder.

"All right!" he said. "But hurry up!"

"I'll come back for you, Miss Sackett," said Hugh.

She did not trouble to answer that; both she and Delancey crowded into the roadster. She sat on Delancey's knees, he

had his arm around her waist. And she had her back turned to Whitestone.

"Drive like hell!" said Whitestone.

Hugh drove as fast as he considered advisable, and he kept his mind on his driving. This wasn't the time to think. . . .

But there was no need for him to go as far as the shore. Little more than half way there, they met Rosalind Whitestone coming home. She came in a hospital ambulance, and Doctor Madison and a young interne were with her. She did not need them, though. Nobody could ever do anything more for her. Hugh drew up his car at the side of the road, and Doctor Madison got out of the ambulance.

"Try artificial respiration, you damned fool!" said Whitestone. "Often—even hours after . . ."

"It's no use, Whitestone," the doctor answered. "I'm sorry. . . . Try to take it quietly. There couldn't have been any pain. She struck her head against a rock. Better get him home, Delancey."

Delancey had taken his friend's arm when that thing which Hugh had dreaded, happened. Elsie put her arm about Whitestone's neck, laid her cheek against his.

"Try to stand it, Bob," she said. "Bob, my dear darling. I'm with you—all the time."

He did not speak or stir. He stood as if her frail young arm were his sole support.

"Bob, darling, go home now. I'll come later . . . to be with you. I'll help you all I can."

"Come on, Robert!" said Delancey roughly. "Can you give us a lift in the ambulance, doctor? Then Acheson can take the young lady back to Mrs. Luff's."

She made no demur, but got back into Hugh's car. And already Delancey was trying to explain to Doctor Madison.

"She's very high-strung. . . . Had dinner with poor Mrs. Whitestone only last night. . . . She was at my house when we got the news, and naturally . . . A shock like that . . . She doesn't know what she's saying or doing. . . ."

The doctor and the interne had nothing to say to that. Hugh wondered if Elsie had heard. . . .

"Do you want to go back at once?" he asked her. "Or would you rather drive a bit? . . ."

"I want to go back," she said. "And I want never to see you or speak to you again."

"Rather difficult to manage," said Hugh equably. "But I'd like very much to know what I've done."

"It's what you'd *like* to do," she said.

* * * * *

Delancey sat by the window of the little sitting-room of the cottage, rigid, tense with misery. He had no idea what to do, what to say to Whitestone who sat on the sofa, his head buried in his hands. He had so slight a personal experience of grief, he felt so inadequate. His instinct would have been to adopt a tone of hearty sympathy, to cheer up the poor fellow, but this case was too complicated. There must be, he thought, something worse than shock or sorrow in Whitestone's heart.

"He won't be able to help remembering what he said about Rosalind yesterday. Of course, I knew he didn't mean it, but just the same . . . Now that she's gone . . ."

In a way, she hadn't gone. She was here in the cottage, lying upstairs in the room she had used to share with Whitestone. Whitestone had insisted upon that, and had insisted, violently, upon seeing her, although the doctor had tried to make him wait until the undertaker's people had done their merciful work. Delancey had not looked at her

"I'd rather keep the memory of the last time I saw her alive," he had said, and wanted to believe it.

Whitestone had been unmanageable. He had forced Delancey to drive him over to see Mrs. Browne. Poor Naomi had been half-hysterical. Her husband had very warmly resented the intrusion, but Whitestone would have her account of the accident then and there.

"Simply made things worse for himself," thought Delancey. Worse for Delancey, too. The memory of Naomi's tear-stained face, the echo of her broken voice, made the tragedy more harrowing. She was a timid swimmer who had remained inside the cove while Rosalind swam around the rocky point, out of sight.

"She always did that. She'd done it hundreds of times. . . . I just waited for her to come swimming back. . . . I'll be looking for her green cap all the rest of my life. . . ."

I waited, and when it seemed a long time, I called her. . . . Somehow it frightened me, to hear myself calling. . . . I climbed up on the rocks and she *wasn't there*. . . . *There wasn't anything but the sea.*"

"You mean to tell me . . ." Whitestone had demanded of Doctor Madison, "that she could have struck her head and sunk, without calling out even once? She was a strong swimmer. She knew every inch of that shore. How was it possible for her to do what you say—strike her head with that violence?"

Madison had been very patient with him.

"You'll find it's generally the good swimmers who meet with these disasters," he had said. "They grow overconfident. They take chances. . . . And there are these jagged rocks just below the surface of the water and quite a surf running. . . ."

"Think she'd swim on into a rock when she knew the coast so well?" Whitestone had asked, scornfully.

"She might have been floating. She might have had a sudden cramp."

"No!" Whitestone had said. "It's impossible, I tell you! The thing's got to be investigated."

Only it was not impossible. It was true. It had actually happened, so horribly soon after Whitestone had said—what he had said.

"Seems almost like a judgment," thought Delancey.

He wished he had not thought that. It seemed cruel and treacherous, with poor Whitestone there before him in his anguish. It seemed cruel, also, and indecent to feel hungry. . . . But he had had no lunch, and it was now late in the afternoon.

"I wish I'd had a chance to ring up Josephine," he thought. "She was badly upset. But of course she'll understand how it is."

He was a little surprised by his own position in this affair. The doctor, the undertaker, the Brownes, that young Acheson, everyone seemed to take it for granted that he was the one to take charge of Whitestone. He was more than willing to do all he could, only he wasn't, perhaps, as competent as other people imagined. And there was Elsie, too.

She treated him like an old friend, she seemed to have a touching sort of confidence in him.

It made him very uncomfortable to think about Elsie, so he stopped. She was a young girl, a nice girl, and therefore belonged in a particular category. Nice young girls could not be anything worse than silly, and "silly" was what he resolutely called her conduct. He would not admit that he had seen on her face a look that had alarmed him, a look fierce, reckless, dangerous. . . .

"Fact is," he said to himself, "I don't exactly know what I'd better do next."

The sun was beginning to set and here he was, alone in the cottage with Whitestone. Not quite alone, though. The undertaker's people had gone, but Rosalind was there, upstairs. . . . That was another thing it was better not to think about . . . Naturally, he could not dream of leaving Whitestone unless someone else came. Someone else ought to come, neighbours, relations, someone to see about dinner. There ought to be a servant.

"I wonder—" he thought, "in the circumstances, I wonder if Josephine might—"

He confessed to himself, with melancholy resignation, that he really had no idea what Josephine might do, or how she felt. She had often enough expressed her dislike for Robert and Rosalind, and, for all he knew, this tragedy might not have softened her. But, on the other hand, she might be overcome with remorse. He took a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket, and, to his dismay, found it empty. He felt in his vest pocket for the very expensive silver case Josephine had given him. He was very proud of that case, but it never occurred to him to bring it out unless other people were present. Days, even weeks went by without his remembering it. He thought of it now because he needed a smoke, but it was not there.

"Must have left it in my grey suit," he thought. "Now, about Josephine . . . She's changeable. . . . Sometimes she's—well—unreasonable. But I've known her to be damn generous to people in trouble."

He began to recall all the instances he could of her generosity, and it heartened him.

"She was certainly upset enough when she heard the news," he thought. "Yes . . . Yes, I'll try it. . . ."

He glanced cautiously at Robert, who did not stir, then he rose and went into the hall, closing the sitting-room door after him. There was only a wall-telephone here, and the sight of it caused him a pang. He thought of the five French telephones in his own house.

"We've got pretty well everything," he thought. "And Robert . . ."

Robert had lost his wife; Robert had no money, no servants to make him comfortable, and apparently, no friend but Delancey. He rang up his house, and asked to speak to Mrs. Delancey.

"She's gone out, sir," the housemaid answered.

"Did she say where she was going?"

"Yes, sir. She went to the beach for a picnic with Mr. and Mrs. Parrish."

"To where—!" he began and stopped. "All right, Annie," he said. "I'll call up again later."

It did not seem possible that after the emotion she had shown at the news of Rosalind's death, Josephine could have gone to a picnic, and of all places, to the beach. Nevertheless, he was not sure. She so often confounded him with reasons, motives he could not have imagined.

"She might have felt she had to get her mind off this thing," he reflected. "Well . . . I suppose I couldn't ring up Mrs. Luff and asked her to get hold of a—a trained nurse, someone to look after Robert and cook a dinner. . . . I dare say I could get some sort of meal for us, if necessary."

The thought of going into poor Rosalind's kitchen was far from agreeable; he felt that he would almost have preferred to go hungry. But there was Robert to be considered, and Robert he now regarded as a sort of invalid. He had nothing to smoke, either. . . . On tip-toe, with the buoyancy common to men of his build, he went back down the hall, and cautiously opened the sitting-room door. Robert might have fallen asleep.

Robert was just putting a bottle of whiskey under the sofa.

In haste, Delancey retreated back along the hall and returned to the sitting-room with considerable noise. White-

stone was sitting now as he had left him, his head in his hands.

"I don't like this," he thought. "I mean, if he wanted a drink, why not take one and offer me one? I could do with it! I mean—there's something—well—I can't help calling it stealthy."

He remembered suddenly that Josephine had applied that very word to him, only yesterday. Stealthy she had called him, and horrible. . . .

"Robert!" he said abruptly. "See here, old man! You won't do yourself any good by—by brooding like this. The thing is, you ought to eat, to keep up your strength."

A car was stopping before the house, and Delancey lost no time in going to open the door, to see Elsie descend from a taxi and start up the path. And whether it was some reflection from the faint, pale sky, or some fancy produced by his own fatigue and distress, she seemed to Delancey a creature not quite human. She was dressed in white, her face looked white, her black eyes tragic; she did not smile or speak, only looked steadily into his face as she approached. He drew aside, as if she were capable, like a ghost, of walking through him.

She went straight into the house, and he followed her, closing the door behind him. They stood facing each other in the dark little hall.

"I'm going to stay with Bob now," she said. "Do you want the taxi?"

"But—" he said. "I don't think. . . . I mean—I'll stay too, and help you."

She took his hand in both of hers.

"No," she said. "I'll do much better alone. You've been wonderful. You really understand. Please go away now."

She was perfectly composed and quiet, for a moment longer she held his hand in her firm grasp.

"You're our friend," she said. "Come back soon."

He got into the taxi, and as soon as the cottage was out of sight, he began to reproach himself.

"I shouldn't have left her. It's not right for a young girl. I can't understand how I left her. . . ."

Only, her appearance, her behaviour had been so resolute,

so striking, and he had been a little dazed with weariness.

"Something about her . . ." he thought. "Sweep you off your feet. But I'll see that some other arrangement is made at once. I'd like to bring Robert home with me for a few days—until he can make some plans."

Their house looked exceedingly pleasant to him now, with the last rays of the afternoon sun in gold bars across the lawn. Josephine was on the veranda and someone else, too, a woman in a light dress. He was relieved to see her; it was always easier when there was a third person present.

"Oh! You're back, at last?" said Josephine. "Shawe, you've met Miss Phillips."

Her manner of speaking these words at once put him at a disadvantage. She implied that he had no doubt forgotten Miss Phillips, that he always forgot his wife's friends. As a matter of fact, he had an almost royal ability to remember names and faces and even little remarks he had heard. Because he genuinely liked people, and was interested in them; he had in his heart an immense good will for his fellows.

"Certainly I've met Miss Phillips!" he said, heartily. "At the Parrishes'. How's that terrier of yours you were telling me about, Miss Phillips?"

Miss Phillips liked his remembering her terrier, and when she smiled she was attractive, a grey-eyed, brown-haired young woman, self-possessed and good-humoured. He could have sustained a pleasing conversation with her, if he had not recalled the tragic quality of this day. He stopped smiling, and sat on the rail of the veranda, staring heavily at nothing. . . . Surely Josephine or Miss Phillips would begin to speak about Rosalind. . . .

"It's been nice and cool, hasn't it?" said Miss Phillips.

"But the sunset looks like a hot day to-morrow," said Josephine.

"I don't mind hot weather," said Miss Phillips.

He could not understand them. They both knew what had happened, they must realize that he had been with his friend; how was it possible that they should ignore it, not make even a perfunctory enquiry about poor Whitestone?

"Shawe!" said his wife. "I want to speak to you. Excuse me just a moment, Helen."

She went into the house, erect and imperious, and, filled with secret rebellion, Delancey followed her along the hall to the small room at the end which was called his "study." When they were first married, Josephine had furnished it as a surprise for him. "A place of your very own," she had said. "I know what that means to a man." But it never had been his "very own" any more than anything else in the house. She came into it when she pleased, without even knocking at the door.

"I've asked Helen Phillips to stay with me—indefinitely," she said.

Her tone was openly challenging, but he decided to take no notice of it.

"That's nice," he observed.

Then he saw that she was trembling, and his heart sank. Neither of them had mentioned the disgraceful scene of yesterday morning; she had pretended to be asleep when he had got home that night, and at breakfast she had been very amiable, had not even asked him where he had dined. He had made up his mind to forgive and forget the outrageous things she had said about stopping his little income and not letting him use the car. He had hoped that she felt ashamed of herself. He could hope that no longer; she was obviously in one of her tempers.

"Helen's going to stay indefinitely," she repeated. "I have no intention of being left alone in this house with you."

He had had perhaps the hardest day of his life. He was very tired and hungry, and his usual patience failed him.

"You needn't worry about me," he said, briefly. "I won't bother you."

"After this morning," she said. "I'd be *afraid* to be here alone with you."

"What are you talking about?" he demanded.

"You're not very good at hiding your feelings," she replied, with a short laugh. "You were really a little too obvious this morning. You couldn't even pretend to care how shocked and upset I was when that girl pretended to faint. And as soon as she lifted a finger, you went off with her without even telling me you were going. You've been gone all day."

"Josephine," he said, making a despairing effort to speak quietly. "I'm pretty well worn out. I've been with Robert ever since this morning. The whole thing's been . . . Well, I should think you'd be able to imagine. I've had nothing to eat since breakfast. I'm not inclined to have any sort of argument with you now. I'll simply say that you're entirely and absolutely wrong about the whole thing. And you're *heartless!*" he added with a violence that surprised him. "You haven't even mentioned Robert."

"*I'm* not a hypocrite," she said. "I've never liked him or Rosalind. I'm not going to pretend to feel what I don't feel. I leave that to you. My whole life lies in ruins. I've given you everything—all my love and trust, and you've betrayed me. For that insolent ill-mannered little fool."

"What the devil can anyone say to a woman like you?" he cried. "I've hardly spoken a word to her—"

"My dear Shawe," she protested, again with that short laugh. "Really—! Of course I was one of the last people to hear of it. It's always that way. But for the last two weeks everyone in the place has been talking about your girl and her married man who's so devoted."

He began to speak, but checked himself.

"Can't give Robert away," he thought.

"I'm not quite blind," she went on. "This morning it was plain enough. I'm simply an obstacle, a nuisance to you. You want me out of your way, so that you can enjoy yourself."

"And that's God's truth," he thought.

The thought was like a physical shock. He sat down hastily in the nearest chair, so white that she stared at him in alarm.

"Shawe!" she said, and began to cry. "Shawe, what's the matter.

"You . . . I . . . can't forgive a thing like that," he said. "You've gone too far. . . ."

"Shawe, I didn't mean . . ."

"Well, you said it!" he cried. "You said . . . No! I can't forgive that. . . ."

He rose heavily.

"I'm going," he said.

"Shawe, oh, no! I didn't mean what I said. . . . I swear I didn't. . . . You can't go. . . . Where are you going?"

"I don't know. Into town. Let me alone, Josephine! I tell you you've gone too far."

She clung to his arm.

"Forgive me, Shawe. Just this once! I'll never, never . . . Shawe, I'll go now, this instant and tell Helen not to stay. . . . You know I *do* trust you, Shawe. . . ."

He pulled loose her clinging fingers and went to the door. But she was there before him, blocking his way.

"Shawe, darling! Just do one thing to please me! Just have your dinner first. I beg you! You're tired and overwrought. If you'll just have your dinner, I know you'll see things differently. . . . Sit down, Shawe, darling! . . . Let me mix you a nice little cocktail and bring it to you here where it's cool and quiet. . . ."

He was suddenly at the end of his strength, unable to resist her. He sat down again, and closed his eyes, with a long sigh that was like a sob. She brought him a shaker of cocktails and a plate of hors d'œuvres. She stood beside him, tearful, solicitous, tender. After two drinks he felt better; he reached in his pockets for a cigarette and again brought out that empty packet.

"Shawe, darling, you don't use the silver case I gave you. Don't you like it, dear? Do you want some other kind of case?"

"No," he said. "No, thanks. I do like it. . . . I left it in the pocket of my grey suit."

"Shawe, I'll tell Helen to go."

"No," he said. "Don't do that."

"But will you not go away, Shawe?"

"All right," he said. "I won't."

"Shawe, darling. I'm not really heartless about Robert. I feel frightfully sorry. Only it was because I thought—Shawe, you can't imagine what it is for a woman to see her youth slipping away—and then to hear that gossip." A restless movement from him stopped her. "But I'm not heartless, Shawe. If there's anything I can do for poor Robert . . ."

"Well," he said, "the natural thing would be to ask him here for a few days."

"I'll ring him up now."

"No," he said quickly. "Better leave it to me. Robert's in a bad state. . . . I'd better run over there after dinner. . . ."

She sat down on the arm of his chair.

"Shawe—Shawe, darling. . . . Just tell me that you forgive me. That nothing's changed between us. . . ."

He wanted to put his arm around her as he had done a hundred times, he wanted to speak to her affectionately, to reassure her. But he *could not*. Something was changed between them, most horribly and irrevocably changed.

"You're—overwrought," she said with a sob. "I won't bother you now, poor boy."

CHAPTER VII

A STORM COMES UP

JOSEPHINE suggested his having dinner alone in the study; but the last thing on earth he wanted was to be alone. He went up to their bedroom, shaved, had a cold shower, and dressed in his dinner jacket. When he descended, he found the table decked as for a gala occasion. Josephine, her eyes a little reddened, was wearing a low-cut black frock he had once admired. Miss Phillips, nonchalant and amiable, had dressed too. She looked, Delancey thought, very distinguished and handsome. He wished she would stay forever, so that never again would he and Josephine sit down at the table alone together.

There were pink roses on the table, pink candles, ruby glass, the best china with the gilt edges; the food beautifully cooked. He was half-ashamed of his lusty appetite, remembering poor Robert, half-ashamed of his comfort.

And he put out of his head that thing he had thought, banished it utterly. Josephine had seen that he was overwrought. That was it. He and Josephine had had a little row, and it had cleared the air, wonderfully. He had never seen her gentler, more anxious to please. She even made a point of discussing the morning's tragedy, in a tone of profound sympathy and with an anxious eye on her husband.

"A dreadful thing," Miss Phillips agreed.

But in her tone there was not the slightest sympathy. She had not known either of the Whitestones, she was not in the least affected, and her remark was nothing but politeness. Somehow this pleased Delancey. He began to feel a profound respect and admiration for Miss Phillips, with her rather drawling well-bred voice, her nice, straight little nose, her imperturbable good-humour.

"She'll make some lucky fellow a fine wife," he thought.

He fancied he knew the sort of house she would have, dim, cool, tranquil, nice people, like the Luffs, coming in and out. No scenes, ever. . . .

"Well, Josephine and I get on very well for the most part," he said to himself, as he drove the car down the drive in the sultry evening. "A little flare-up now and then, but what's that amount to?"

As he drew nearer to the cottage, his comfortable, after-dinner mood began to leave him; back came the old impression. Rosalind lying dead in the cottage. And that girl . . .

"*She* won't be there," he assured himself. "Mrs. Luff wouldn't allow that. Robert himself wouldn't allow it."

Unless, of course, the poor fellow had been a bit too free with the whiskey. If he had, no one who knew the circumstances would blame him. For he was suffering not only the natural grief any man would feel, but he must be remembering those things he had said only the day before her death.

"I won't deny it," thought Delancey. "He practically said he was going to do away with her. Of course, he didn't mean it, but it'll be bad to remember how bitter he felt against her. . . . Even though it was only a passing mood. . . ."

Just for a moment he remembered how he himself had felt, at Rosalind's last dinner. He had not thought then that Whitestone's words expressed a passing mood. He had believed them, and he had known a horrible fear. He had even made up his mind to have a private talk with Rosalind, to advise her to go away at once for a visit because of Robert's "nerves"!

"I was a fool!" he told himself. "It was nothing but talk, and talk he'll regret to his dying day."

He was relieved to see lights shining from the cottage win-

dows, lights downstairs, none above where Rosalind lay.

"Poor girl," he thought.

The front door was unlocked; he pushed open the screen door and entered. Rosalind had always been glad to see him. Poor girl . . .

He was a little surprised at the sight that met his eye. The little sitting-room was brightly lit, and in it were three people, all still and silent. Whitestone and Elsie were side by side on the sofa, and across the room was that young Acheson nursing his ankle and gazing at nothing. None of them looked at one another.

"Hello!" said Delancey in a low, subdued voice.

"Oh . . . Shawe?" said his friend. "Come in!"

He came in and sat down, with a civil greeting to Miss Sackett and Mr. Acheson, then he too fell silent. A pale sheet of lightning flashed across the sky.

"We may get a storm," said Delancey in the same subdued tone. "Break up the heat."

No one answered this, and he could find nothing more to say. A little gust of wind sent the window curtain fluttering into the room. He remembered Rosalind making those curtains. Very far away there was a mutter of thunder.

"This won't do!" he thought. "I mean to say—Robert shouldn't sit here, brooding. . . ."

Yet he did not know how to break the silence; he did not even venture to light a cigarette. Again the lightning played, the curtain billowed out, the distant thunder rolled. His eye fell upon the Sunday newspaper and he had an inspiration.

"Robert," he said. "Did you see what they said about Mallier's exhibition?"

"No," answered Whitestone.

"Ought to interest you," said Delancey, rising and taking up the newspaper. He had read about the exhibition, solely because of Robert. On his own account he would certainly not have read "Art Notes."

"Here it is," he said, folding a page neatly. "The notice is pretty hard on the poor fellow."

"Let's see," said Whitestone, with a sudden awakening of interest. He felt in his pockets and frowned. "I can't find my glasses. Read it to me, will you?"

Delancey did so, a little embarrassed by certain names and words he could not pronounce.

"Fellow's nothing but a charlatan, anyhow," said Whitestone, when he had finished. "He's fooled the public for five years, but the critics have never been fooled. . . ."

Again that strained and painful silence descended. And suddenly Delancey thought.

"I can't take Robert home with me. . . . I mean—we can't leave Rosalind here alone. . . . No. . . . I'll have to stay here with him."

The idea was far from pleasing. The storm was coming nearer, the wind that blew in the window was almost chilly now; there was something tense, ominous in the air.

"But of course I'll have to," he thought, unhappily.

"Miss Sackett!" said Acheson.

His voice was a very quiet one, yet it seemed to ring through the room. They all looked at him.

"Well?" she said.

"There's a storm coming up," he said, amiably. "I think we'd better be starting home."

"I don't mind storms," she said.

"I think we'd better be going. Mrs. Luff will be anxious."

"I told Mrs. Luff not to wait up for me."

"But she will, you know," said Acheson, still amiable, but with a far from amiable glint in his grey eyes. "We'd better . . ."

"There's the rain now!" said Whitestone. "Take a look at the windows, will you? If you'll go upstairs, with Acheson, I'll see to the downstairs ones."

That was obvious enough. He wanted a word alone with the girl. And somehow, with Rosalind lying upstairs, it seemed horrible. . . . Horrible to go upstairs, too, in the dark. . . .

"Delancey and I can look after the whole thing," said Hugh, amiably, and in spite of his reluctance to move about in the dark little house, and his feeling that Whitestone and the girl should not be left alone, Delancey followed him. "The wind's south," said Hugh. "We'd better look at the back windows first. D'you know where the switch is?"

As Delancey turned on the light in the dining-room, a clap

of thunder sounded very close, and the rain came in a deluge. They hurried through the swing-door into the pantry.

"Broken window-pane here," Delancey observed. "We'll have to close the shutters."

The rain was driving in through a little window high in the wall. Delancey, being the taller, pushed up the sash, drew the shutters in and fastened them. As he stepped back, something wet and cold brushed his face.

"My God!" he cried. "What's that?"

"A bathing-suit," said Acheson. "Hanging on a line."

Delancey felt suddenly sick, physically sick. Rosalind's bathing-suit. . . . What did they do in such cases . . . ? Dress the poor girl, perhaps, in one of those fresh, gay little dresses she had liked so much . . . ?

"I—can't . . ." he said.

Hugh had found the switch, in the clear light he was looking narrowly at Delancey.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I—this thing's a little—too much for me. . . ."

"Better go and sit down," said Hugh, briefly. "I'll carry on."

When Delancey, sick and shaken, went back to the sitting-room, Whitestone and Elsie were talking together in whispers. They stopped as he entered, and he regarded them with something that was almost hostility.

He could feel no sympathy for his friend now, or for the girl. It was monstrous that they could so affront and ignore Rosalind in her own house. Even if Robert had not loved her very much, even if he had not loved her at all, it was brutal to ignore her, lying dead upstairs.

"Josephine suggested my bringing you home with me," he said, coldly.

"Out of the question," said Robert. And, of course, that was the truth. Rosalind could not be left here alone.

"Then I'll ring up Josephine and tell her I'm staying here with you to-night."

"You needn't," said Elsie. "I'm going to stay."

Delancey was really shocked, and he made no effort to conceal it. "Well . . ." he began when Hugh spoke from the doorway.

"We'd better be starting, Miss Sackett."

"I'm going to stay here," said Elsie.

"We'd better start at once," said Hugh.

He was considerably younger than the other two men, he was slight, boyish, unassertive. Yet there was something about him, in his voice and manner, that gave him indefinable authority.

"He's right," thought Delancey. "She's got to be made to realize."

She turned to Hugh.

"There's no need for you to interfere," she said. "I'm not going with you."

"Whitestone," said Hugh. "Will you try to persuade Miss Sackett?"

To Delancey's consternation, Whitestone was silent.

"Even if she doesn't, Robert ought to realize that the girl can't stay here," he thought. "I don't care how upset he is. He ought to realize . . ."

"Will you remind Miss Sackett that your wife is still in the house?" said Hugh, and Delancey thought he had never heard a voice so merciless.

"You'd better go, Elsie," said Whitestone.

"Do you really want me to go, Bob?"

They looked at each other, as if there were no one else present, looked and looked into each other's eyes.

"I think so . . ." said Whitestone.

She turned then and went out of the house, and Hugh went after her. The screen door slammed behind them.

"She's a fool!" said Whitestone.

Delancey stared at him.

"I don't know what is the matter with you," he said, sternly. "Upon my word—you don't deserve . . . When she's been so—so kind to you. . . . And when I think of what you told me that morning, about the way you felt toward the girl—"

"That?" said Whitestone, fiercely. "Couldn't you see for yourself that I didn't know what I was saying yesterday? I was drunk."

"You were not," said Delancey. "Though maybe you are now."

"I was drunk, I tell you!" shouted Whitestone. "Everything I said then was all dam' nonsense. Anyone except you would know that the only woman I ever loved, or could love was Rosalind. Elsie's nothing but a hysterical little fool."

The front window of the sitting-room was open, and Whitestone's voice was clearly audible to Hugh and Elsie as they went along the path in the rain.

Her foot slipped in the mud and Hugh took her arm, but she pulled away from him. He opened the door of the car, she got in and he followed her.

"I suppose," she said, "that even you could see that that was camouflage. . . . He doesn't want me involved."

"Yes," said Acheson.

But his quiet forbearance did not placate her.

"I'd like you to know," she said harshly, "that Bob and I are going to be married."

A jagged streak of lightning seemed to cut the road for a moment like a fiery sword. The rain was drumming loud on the roof of the car.

"I hope not," said Acheson.

"I know you do!" she cried. "You were horrible to him! Even now—when he's in such trouble—all alone, you went into his house and scarcely spoke to him. You had no right to come!"

"If I hadn't," he said, with that invincible patience. "Mrs. Luff would have come. . . ."

"I told her . . ."

"I know," he said. "You told her you felt you ought to go. But she looked at it in a different way. And so do I. And I hope Whitestone does. It's impossible for you to be there alone with Whitestone. . . ."

"Do you think that in a tragedy like this, I care a snap of my fingers for stupid, outworn conventionalities?"

"I think," said Hugh, "that you're looking at this whole thing from a point of view that's outworn and conventional and sentimental."

"Sentimental?" she repeated.

"That's the word I'd use."

"Why?"

"You've got this idea . . . Your father was very unhappy, and you saw what made him unhappy. He was a talented man and he got no sympathy or understanding. You think it's been the same way with Whitestone. You think he's a genius, and that you're the only one to make him happy."

"Who told you?" she cried.

"No one. I've listened to what you said and I've watched you, that's all."

"And you call that 'sentimental'?"

"I do. Sentimental and impossible."

"There's nothing," she said, "nothing that can stop me. I know Bob's a genius and anyone ought to be proud to help him."

"You can't help him."

"Why can't I?"

"I don't know anything about geniuses," said Hugh. "But whether Whitestone's a genius or not, he's a man. I know how to judge a man. And he's—"

"Don't dare to say anything against him!"

"I've got to," said Hugh. "I want to make you see now, before it's too late."

A terrific clap of thunder made her jump; the lightning illuminated the road.

"We've gone past the Luffs'," she cried.

"I know. I've got to talk to you—I've got to make you see *now* that Whitestone's no good. He's yellow. Think, won't you? Forget it's you and Whitestone. Think of a man who'd go to a girl, a young girl, with complaints about his wife."

"What makes you think he did that?"

"It's got to be that way," said Acheson, slowly, frowning to himself in the dark. "The Luffs think Whitestone was happy with his wife. You'd have thought so too, if he hadn't told you otherwise."

"I might possibly be more observant," she said, with an uncertain attempt at irony.

"When you spoke to me last night," he went on, "it was on his account."

"Are you trying to be like a detective out of a book?"

"No. I'm not brainy. Not by a long shot. I only see things, and listen, and try to put two and two together."

"Well, *why* are you doing this now? Why don't you let me alone? I'm nearly twenty. I know what I'm doing. Why do you try to ferret out what I don't want you to know? Let me *alone!*"

"I can't," he said. "I can't even wait until tomorrow. You've got to see *now* what Whitestone is."

"Why now?"

"Because," he said, "to-morrow's it's going to be harder for you."

"Listen," she said. "I don't know how you guessed it, but what you said about father was true. I saw all his wonderful talent ruined, all his faith in himself destroyed. And I think that's the most horrible thing in the world. You say yourself that you don't know anything about geniuses. Well I do! The fact that I've got a second-rate talent of my own makes me understand it all the better. I found out last year that *I'd* never amount to anything much. My playing is just good. And I made up my mind then that if I could, I'd do for someone else what nobody ever did for father. I know Bob has faults and weaknesses. I know it better than you can. But do you think that matters? It doesn't! He's got to have infinite sympathy and understanding. . . . I don't care if you know the whole thing now. You'd find it out anyhow in that detestable way you have. I did want the money on his account. He was desperate. He was frightened!"

"Frightened of what?"

"I don't know. He didn't know himself. He only said that if he couldn't get away, he didn't know what would happen. And I told him I'd help him to get away." She was silent for a moment. "He still wants to get away," she said. "I suppose you're not willing now . . . ?"

"No," said Hugh.

She put her hands over her ears.

"Take me home!" she said. "I won't listen to another word!"

With a long sigh, he turned the car.

CHAPTER VIII

ACHESON'S VIEW OF IT

"COME in here, Hugh," called Mrs. Luff.

He had returned to the house, after letting Elsie out, and taking the car to the garage. He was tired and dispirited, and in no mood for talking. But what Mrs. Luff wanted must be done. She was in the drawing-room sitting in the dark by the window, looking out at the lightning that still flickered across the sky. He made his way across the room and dropped into a chair beside her.

"Hugh!"

"Mrs. Luff . . ."

"That child worries me. She *would* run off to Whitestone. . . . She was so passionate about it. Her father was like that. A fascinating man and brilliant and such a fool. It bothers me. . . ."

"What was her mother like?"

"Her mother never did a foolish thing in her life, except marrying Foxe Sackett. She was very good-looking and very cool and prudent and rather amused at the world. I think she was the most irritating woman who ever lived. And she's made Elsie feel that there's something splendid in being a fool."

"Perhaps there is," said Hugh.

"Hugh!" she said, with energy. "Don't."

"No . . ." he said. "I won't. But she's—I shouldn't care to be like your Mrs. Sackett, cool and prudent and rather amused. . . . I've been thinking to-day that I'm rather cold-blooded."

"What do you think of Elsie, Hugh?"

He did not answer for a long time.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But we don't hit it off."

"Don't you think she's lovely, Hugh?"

"That doesn't seem quite the word."

"Please tell me! I'm so fond of her, Hugh. Is it because she's so reckless and silly about that Whitestone man? Because that's really nothing."

"Mind if I turn on the light?" he said. "I don't like talking to you in the dark. I don't trust you."

She was looking up into his face, dazzled at first by the sudden light, then her glance grew more intense.

"Hugh . . ." she said. "Something's hurt you."

"I've just found out something I didn't know before. I am a prig!"

"Oh, I've known it for years, my dear boy! It's one of the nicest things about you. It's so unexpected at your age, and with all your money."

"And I'm hard," he said. "Hard as nails."

"Yes," she said. "You can be sometimes. Hugh . . . Are you going to do something that will hurt my poor Elsie?"

"Yes. . . ."

"You'd better have a whiskey and soda before you go to bed, Hugh."

"Aren't you going to argue with me about what I'm going to do?"

She shook her head, with a faint smile.

"I'll trust you," she said. "Good-night."

He bent and kissed her on the temple; then he went upstairs to his room, and in fifteen minutes he was in bed and asleep.

But he was up very early the next morning and off in his car, and when Luff and Elsie came down to breakfast, he had not returned.

"Queer, too . . ." said Luff. "Most punctilious sort of fellow. . . . Never late. Never fails."

"I can't *stand* people like that," said Elsie.

Luff glanced at her sidelong.

"Well," he said. "In a way, y'know, it makes life easier, to show up when you're expected—to be on time and so on."

"Who wants life to be easy?" she asked.

"I do!" said Luff promptly. "Oh, I do!"

She smiled half reluctantly, and while she drank her coffee, Luff studied her.

"Either she's on one of these fool diets, or she's in love," he thought. "Both of 'em very bad for girls. . . . Poor arrangement altogether that the time for falling in love should be the time when you haven't any sense. Now, if people

only fell in love when they were—say fifty—when they'd had their families and their children were grown up . . . Much better. Mistakes wouldn't matter so much. This kid . . . But Anabel will look after her."

He sighed with relief and helped himself to another slice of toast. The clock in the hall struck nine.

"Got to get the 9:30," he observed. "Board meeting."

He went upstairs to take leave of his wife and as soon as he was well away, Elsie went to the telephone in the library and rang up Whitestone's house.

"Hello?" answered a voice that made her gasp.

"I want to speak to Mr. Whitestone," she said.

"I'm sorry, Miss Sackett, but—"

"I *will* speak to him," she said. "You can't do this. Call him at once!"

"No," said Acheson.

She hung up the receiver and stood for a moment, resting her hand on the table, her knees trembling. Then, lifting the receiver again, she ordered a taxi.

"At once, please!" she said. "And tell the driver to wait in the road outside the gates."

As she turned toward the door, she saw Mrs. Luff there, an unusual thing at this hour.

"Elsie, dear . . ."

"Yes, Mrs. Luff. In a moment. I want to get something."

"Elsie, wait, my dear! Don't go until I've spoken to you."

The girl looked about her, a desperate, trapped glance. One of the French windows was open.

"Elsie! Hugh just telephoned!"

"I'll come back, Mrs. Luff . . ."

She was through the window like a flash, and running bare-headed across the lawn, down the drive. The car stood waiting before the house to take Luff to the station. He might try to stop her. . . . Everyone was trying to stop her. There was some horrible plot—something she didn't know. . . . The taxi had not come. . . . Perhaps they wouldn't let it come. . . . She thought of the Luffs, of Acheson, as people of immeasurable power and prestige, and alone, with them all arrayed against him, that most unhappy, most unfortunate man. She knew he was weak, pitifully so, and

he had turned to her for help. He was the first human creature who had ever needed her, had ever depended upon her.

"And now they'll send him away," she thought. "They'll tell him it's best for *me*. They'll make him go now when he's sick and utterly wretched from this horrible shock. I don't know what would happen to him if I deserted him now. . . . Last evening he looked—haunted. . . . It's easy to imagine how he must feel. Now he must be remembering all he said about her. It's worse, a thousand times worse than if he'd loved her. . . ."

For had not she herself felt haunted, oppressed with guilt all night, as if, even in listening to his outburst, she had somehow wronged the wife who now lay dead?

"But I couldn't have stopped him," she thought. "He was at the end of the tether. . . ."

It had shocked her, frightened her. She had known the first time she met Whitestone, two weeks ago, that he was attracted to her, and she had been proud. He had shown her his paintings; no one else had seen them, he told her. He had made a crayon study of her head; he had told her she looked like Guido Reni's "Cenci." And she had felt that here was someone she could help, someone who was threatened with the same wretched fate which had overtaken her father, because he had had no one.

She had, all the time, been singularly free from illusions about Whitestone. She had seen that he was unstable, passionately self-willed, that he had a queer strain of something inhuman in him. But her father had had that quality too. He would let his family go hungry while he took what money there was, to go into the country with a friend. She understood that. She could not judge whether Whitestone's work was very good, or not, but she knew that he was an artist. And she knew that she possessed all that he lacked. She had the vitality, the directness that could stimulate him, she had the pride that could win his respect, and she had a loyalty upon which his insecure life could be firmly established.

The night of the little dinner party, he had slipped a note into her hand.

"Burn this as soon as you've read it. I am a fool and a knave to write it. But I can't help it. I love you so. My little beautiful girl, if I could get free of all this, would you marry me? Only if you love me, though. If I had your love, I could do work you'd be proud of. I could do anything. Oh, forgive me. Forgive me, my poor beautiful girl. But I am at the end of everything. If I can't get out of this now, at once, God knows what I shall do. If you care, if you're ever going to love me, just tell me to-night."

She had told him in the room full of other people. She had found a moment to speak to him aside.

"I'll help you to get away," she had said.

"You mean—you care?" he had asked.

And she had answered, "Yes, I care."

She had not spoken on impulse, or recklessly. She had realized fully what her words implied, to what she had pledged herself. She knew very well that this was no romance, but reality, and she had faced it with sombre deliberation.

"*He* won't be able to manage it," she had thought. "I'll have to make all the plans."

And she had made them. She had felt certain that, if the situation were not changed at once, there would be a terrific row between Whitestone and his wife. In his state of intolerable tension, he really needed a violent quarrel; he would not mind that any more than Elsie herself did. Scenes like that cleared the air, in her opinion, and she didn't care if Rosalind got hurt in the process. Rosalind seemed to her small and mean and grasping.

But she did mind hurting the Luffs, because she liked them. And she knew also, from harsh experience in her early years, that a scandal is harmful to an artist. She had decided that Bob must go away at once on a trip, making some pretext that it was for his health, or his work. While he was away, he must write to Rosalind and tell her he was never coming back to her. But he must do that decently, and he must, above all, leave some money with his wife when he went. That was another thing Elsie had learned early in her life; that an artist is judged more by the provision he makes for his family than by his work.

She had known better than to approach the Luffs. They would certainly be kind and generous to her, but they would certainly ask questions. So she had gone to Hugh, and she had got what she asked from him, and she hated him.

Her heart was hot with anger against Acheson. From the beginning, beneath his mild and courteous air he had been trying to thwart her and to hurt Bob. He had slandered him. He had interfered persistently.

"And now," she thought. "He'll be arguing with him. Bob's in no condition to argue. He'll agree to anything. . . . Especially if that—that Acheson drags me into it."

When she reached the cottage, she discovered that she had no money to pay the taxi. That did not disconcert her; she still lived in that child's world in which there was always someone else who would pay. Her clothes had always been bought for her, food and shelter provided, money had little meaning and little value for her.

"Wait, please!" she told the driver, and sprang out. Acheson's car stood before the gate, and she looked at it with scorn. He was one of the Philistines, an outsider who would never understand Bob or herself.

She rang the bell, but no one answered. She tried the door and found it locked.

"But I know Acheson's here," she thought and hurried along the path to the summer-house. They were there. She heard the sound of voices.

"I'll kill you for that, you hound!"

She stopped short, her hand to her heart. That was Bob speaking, in that unsteady, tortured voice.

"No," Hugh answered as if the threat were merely tiresome. "I'm giving you your one chance. Get out now, at once."

"He shan't go!" said Elsie, from the doorway.

She was flushed with haste and excitement, her dark hair was damp on the temples, her eyes were brilliant. The two men faced her in silence, for a moment.

"Bob," she said. "Don't listen to him. Don't think of going away."

"Miss Sackett," said Hugh. "You're giving Whitestone very bad advice. You're—if you knew the harm you were

doing—I ask you, for Whitestone's sake as well as for your own, to go home at once."

Whitestone pushed forward the only chair.

"Sit down, Elsie," he said. "I want you to hear this. I want you to know what this hound's trying to do."

There was a strange exaltation about Whitestone this morning. He looked ill, exhausted, yet filled with a passionate energy. His dark hair was disordered, his collar was grimy; beside him the neat, slight, fair-haired Acheson had in her eyes a look of detestable smugness.

"I knew he'd try to make you go away," she said.

"But you don't know *how* he's trying to do it," said Whitestone.

"Whitestone," said Acheson, with a sort of entreaty in his voice. "Tell Miss Sackett to go. This isn't—"

"I'd like you to know, Elsie," said Whitestone. "Acheson's come here to tell me I murdered Rosalind. . . ."

"Oh . . ." she cried, stretching out her hand toward the back of the chair.

"I want you to hear this," Whitestone repeated. "Because he threatens to go to the police with his theory, if I don't clear out at once. And you might hear of it from someone else."

"You didn't dare . . . ?" she said, turning to Acheson.

He was silent for a moment.

"Won't you go?" he said, presently. "This is between Whitestone and myself."

"It's not," she said. "I want to know everything—every one of the lies you've invented against Bob."

"Tell her, Acheson," said Whitestone. "And see how your story sounds to her."

Again Hugh had difficulty in speaking.

"Whitestone," he said, "this thing you're doing is unforgivable. I said I'd give you a chance. If Miss Sackett doesn't go immediately, you won't get that chance."

"Elsie, what do you say? I'll do as you tell me, Elsie. Shall I run away—?"

"You're not going to make *her* responsible," said Hugh, slowly. He did not look smug now, with his grey eyes narrowed and his jaw set, he looked dangerous and merciless.

"She'll decide," said Whitestone. "I'll go or stay, as she says."

"No," said Hugh. "She shan't have that to remember—that she told you to stay. Because she doesn't—she can't—know what the consequences of your staying will be. No. . . . You've lost your chance now."

Whitestone sat down. "So you're going to the police?" he said. "All right! Go—and be damned to you!"

"I shan't leave Miss Sackett here with you."

"You can't make me go," said Elsie. "Send for the police, if you want. I'm going to stay with Bob."

"Miss Sackett, if I go to the police, they'll arrest Whitestone."

"D'you know what his 'evidence' is, Elsie?" said Whitestone. "He found poor Rosalind's wet bathing-suit hanging up in the pantry."

"It was your suit, Whitestone."

"Only your word against mine, Acheson. Unfortunately I didn't foresee that you were going to play the boy detective, and I took all the things off that line this morning."

"Delancey saw that wet suit, too."

"I'm afraid it would take a little more than that to make Delancey believe I'm a murderer. Just the sight of Rosalind's wet bathing-suit wouldn't be quite enough."

"It's your choice that Miss Sackett has to hear all this," said Hugh. "I didn't want it like this. . . . Mrs. Whitestone's bathing-suit was removed in the hospital, when they took her there from the beach. It's still there."

"Sorry," said Whitestone, "but she had two suits. It was the one she'd worn the day before that you found. I'm afraid that evidence won't convict me."

"It'll help," said Hugh. "That—and your glasses."

"My glasses?" Whitestone repeated with a sort of fierce hilarity.

"I'm putting all my cards on the table," said Hugh. "I'm taking a chance in letting you know all the case against you. I'm doing it on Miss Sackett's account. Because I hope that when she hears, she'll go away."

"Come on!" said Whitestone. "Let's hear about my glasses."

"When we came here yesterday," said Hugh, "you were painting—without your eye-glasses."

"God!" cried Whitestone, laughing. "You make me think of some of the advertisements I've made drawings for. 'You will never have another pair of eyes. It is criminal folly to neglect or abuse them.' So I was actually painting without my eye-glasses! Only I'm afraid that's a crime I've committed before."

"No," said Hugh. "For a certain reason, I made enquiries this morning about that. I asked Mrs. Browne if you ever wore glasses, and she told me you were so far-sighted, you couldn't paint a stroke without them. I went to the optician in the village. . . . I didn't come here to you, Whitestone, until I *knew*."

"Knew I wore glasses, eh?"

"Miss Sackett," said Hugh. "Have I got to go on with this, or will you go now?"

"Go on!" she said. "I want to hear all you've got to say."

He did not begin at once. He was still very quiet and deliberate in his manner, but he ran his fingers inside his collar, as if it had grown tight.

"I'll tell you what happened," he said. "Yesterday morning, Whitestone followed his wife to the beach, without being noticed by her, or by Mrs. Browne. He knew she was in the habit of swimming round a point of rock where she couldn't be seen by Mrs. Browne. He swam out and waited for her there. Naturally she didn't call out. She wasn't surprised or frightened to see him. He forced her head under the water."

"Stop!" cried Elsie. "It's—"

"Yes. It's horrible," said Hugh. "When she began to struggle, he knocked her head against a rock. When it was all over, he swam ashore, took off his bathing-suit and put on his clothes. The whole thing only took a few moments. It's very lonely there. No one saw him. He went home, through the woods and he met no one. He went here, to his studio, and when he heard us coming, he took up a brush—"

"Elsie," said Whitestone, "it's hard for you to listen to this. But if the fellow's going to broadcast his little fantasy—"

"You'll have to stop him, Bob."

"My dear girl, I can't. He's a millionaire's son, and I'm a poor devil of an artist without a penny."

For the first time, Hugh lost his temper.

"Damn you!" he said, in a sudden fury. "That's something I won't—"

"It's true," said Elsie. "You've invented this—horrible thing, because it pleases your vanity. It's a lie—from beginning to end. But people will listen to you because you have money. They'll say there must be something in it, because *you* tell it. Everyone imagines that rich people are disinterested. No one will realize that you've done this—just to make yourself important. I saw last night how proud you were of your 'observation.' You told me you saw things and heard things. So you do. And you draw any conclusion you please from them. I don't suppose anyone ever contradicts you. You live like a king, surrounded by flatterers. But *I* won't flatter you! I tell you that this is all a *lie*!"

She ended with a sob, but her blazing eyes were still fixed on Hugh's face.

"I'm going to stay with Bob," she said. "And we'll fight you—and your money."

She took Whitestone's hand and laid it against her cheek. Hugh turned away and left them.

CHAPTER IX

THE BLOW FALLS

DELANCEY sat on the veranda, a tall mint julep beside him, and between his teeth a new pipe Josephine had given him.

"I love to see you smoke a pipe, Shawe!" she had said.

She regarded his smoking altogether as if it were the endearing and somewhat absurd amusement of a child; she had given him for toys that silver cigarette case, a leather cigar-case, a humidor, and she liked to show them to people.

"Shawe! Cigars just loose in your pocket? Where's that humidor?"

She did not smoke herself.

"I haven't any objection to it," she always told people. "But I'm, well—I suppose I'm over-fastidious. I simply couldn't stand the smell of tobacco in my hair, or on my hands."

She had not offered cigarettes to Miss Phillips this afternoon and he hesitated to do so, for fear Josephine would make that remark again. He didn't wish Miss Phillips to hear it. . . . He felt like a fool, anyhow, sitting here with Josephine watching him fondly, and Miss Phillips rather carefully not looking at him.

"I ought to have gone in to the office to-day," he observed.

"But Shawe dear! After all you've gone through—and sitting up half the night with poor Robert!"

He felt sure that somehow Miss Phillips knew he had not sat up half the night.

"I'm not tired," he said.

"And the inquest's to-morrow," Josephine went on. "Will you have to go, you poor boy?"

"I don't think so. I haven't had any summons."

"I'm going," said Miss Phillips.

"Helen!" protested Josephine. "Isn't that—morbid?"

"I've always thought it was morbid *not* to be curious," said Miss Phillips.

"But Helen! In a dreadful tragedy like this, you must feel something more than curiosity!"

"I'm afraid I don't. You see, I'd never met the White-stones."

A taxi was coming up the drive. Miss Phillips and Delancey watched with the alert interest of the bored. It stopped before the house and to Delancey's surprise, Elsie Sackett descended. She wore a white dress with a frill around the neck, and a wide straw hat with a black velvet band.

"Beautiful girl . . ." he thought. "Picturesque . . ."

But what about Josephine? He glanced uneasily at his wife and saw her advance toward the unexpected guest with a gracious smile.

"You're Mrs. Delancey, aren't you?" asked the girl. "I'm Elsie Sackett. I've been visiting Mrs. Luff. Do you mind . . . ? May I speak to Mr. Delancey a moment?"

Delancey was almost angry at her. This was enough to start another row between himself and Josephine. But he forgot that, when the girl turned her dark eyes to him.

"Certainly!" he said, with heartiness. "Certainly! Come in!"

And let Josephine think what she chose.

He led the girl into his study, drew forward a chair for her, offered a cigarette.

"Mr. Delancey," she said. "I've left the Luffs."

"Er—left the Luffs?" he repeated.

"I couldn't stay . . . A horrible thing has happened. But I don't want to leave this neighborhood. Do you think Mrs. Delancey would let me stay here a few days?"

For the first time he felt the whole crushing weight of his dependence. For the first time all the amiable little pretences that had sustained him crumbled, left him poor indeed. Josephine's house, Josephine's money, nothing of his own. He had not even a moral ascendancy; such influence as he had over her was unstable and tenuous. He didn't know how she would take the girl's request. She might be very pleased to have a former guest of the Luffs', she might be jealous, and openly, outrageously show her jealousy. He didn't know. . . . He could only stand before the girl, ashamed and miserable and silent.

"Mr. Delancey, if that wouldn't be convenient, will you lend me some money so that I can go to the hotel in the village?"

She asked him as a child might ask, with perfect simplicity, and he answered, "Yes. Yes. I'll be pleased to, Miss Sackett." Because somehow he could get money, if not from Josephine, then he could sell something, his cuff-links, cigarette case. "But I'll ask my wife . . . I don't know what her plans are . . . May be having people to stay, y'know. . . ."

She seemed to accept this as quite ordinary.

"It's on Bob's account that I want to stay here," she went on. "It was bad enough for him before, but now . . . ! Oh! If you knew what that Acheson man has done!"

"Why? What's he done?"

Elsie leaned forward, clasping her hands.

"It was the most horrible scene. . . . This morning with Bob

half sick from shock—this man came and accused him of murdering his wife.”

Delancey turned white and threw down his cigarette.

“Accused . . . But . . . He . . . But how could he?”

“I want to tell you all of it. So that you can help Bob. Hugh Acheson has money and influence. If he spread a story like that . . . And he even said he was going to the police. . . .”

“But he—what—what grounds . . . ?”

“He says that last night you and he found a wet bathing-suit in the pantry of the cottage. And he calls that ‘evidence’ that Bob had been in the sea.”

Delancey sat down heavily in a chair. Was this how people felt when they fainted—this nausea—this black whirling in the head . . . ?

“And his other evidence is that when we went to the studio yesterday, Bob was painting without his glasses on,” she said, scornfully. “Of course, the police won’t pay any attention to him, but other people will. Even the Luffs will. I don’t know what he said to them, but when I got back they were different. Mrs. Luff said she wanted to have a talk with me, but I—I couldn’t. I left a note for her. I told her I was awfully sorry to go away like this, because she’s been sweet to me. . . . But they’re on Acheson’s side. They’re the same kind of people. People who couldn’t ever understand an artist like Bob.”

He was thankful that she went on speaking long enough to give him a chance at recovery. But even now he was not sure how his voice would sound, how his face looked.

“Did Robert—was Robert—upset?” he asked.

“Of course. And furious. Can anything be done to stop Acheson from spreading that rumour?”

“I’ll think,” said Delancey. “Yes, I’ll think it over. I’ll think it over. I’ll . . .” He checked himself. The one thing he must not do was to think it over. Not until he was alone. Mustn’t think that Robert never painted without his glasses, couldn’t do so, in fact. . . . Mustn’t remember that wet bathing-suit that had struck against his face. . . . Above all, must not—must not remember Robert saying, “I’m going to do it tomorrow if the weather’s good. . . .”

"If you'll excuse me," he said, politely. "I'll go and speak to my wife. . . ."

But when he had closed the door of the study behind him, he could go no further. He stood there leaning against the wall, making a desperate effort to summon back his old philosophy, his cheerful insistence that everything was pretty well all right.

"Aren't you feeling well, Mr. Delancey?" asked Helen Phillips' cool voice.

He looked at her with a dazed, sickly smile and he believed he saw in her face something like compassion.

"Thing is," he said. "I wonder if *you'd* ask Josephine . . . If you'd tell Josephine that Miss Sackett wants us to put her up for a few days . . . ?"

"I'd be perfectly willing . . ." said Miss Phillips. "But don't you think that if Miss Sackett herself spoke to Mrs. Delancey, they could arrange things better . . . ?"

He saw then that Miss Phillips understood, that she had seen how things were here. On impulse, in his dreadful dismay, he held out his hand to her and she took it in a firm, cool clasp. She was not beautiful, not extraordinary, a slim, self-possessed young woman of thirty, yet he thought he had never seen anyone so benign, and solacing.

"You're right," he said.

"Come into the dining-room and have a whiskey first," said she. She was right again, that was what he needed. And she asked no questions, did not even look at him.

"Mrs. Delancey's on the veranda," she said. "I was speaking to her about Elsie Sackett. Her father was Foxe Sackett, you know."

He recognized that as a lead for him, and he could have blessed Helen Phillips for it. He gulped down another whiskey, straightened his tie, and went out to Josephine.

"Well!" he said. "Here's a nice thing! This little Sackett girl's come running to you. . . . But you'd better see her. She wants you to put her up. . . . I don't know . . . I mean to say, might upset us. . . ."

He was watching Josephine's face as he had never watched it before. She was angry before he began, then she was startled, then puzzled.

"But why?" she asked.

He was afraid, afraid of every word he must speak. But the thing must be made plausible.

"To tell you the truth," he said, "she's interested—in poor old Robert. I mean, he's an artist, and her father was a musician. Same sort of people, you know. She . . ."

"I'll see her," said Josephine, and went into the house.

He knew she was suspicious, half-hostile, but curious. If she refused to take the girl in, then what? He couldn't go away with her, couldn't take her to the hotel, couldn't give her any money now. . . .

"I wish she hadn't come!" he thought. "She's a nuisance . . . I've got to see Robert. . . ."

He did not want to see Robert. He was afraid to see Robert. . . . The sound of voices in the hall made him jump; Josephine and Elsie were coming together.

"Miss Sackett's going to stay with us for a few days," said Josephine. "Shawe, will you pay the taxi and get her bag?"

He could not pay the taxi. He knew that, all the while he felt in his pockets.

"Got any change, Josephine?"

"Oh . . . Find my purse, will you, Shawe?"

Times without number he had asked that question and she had made that response. Even on their honeymoon. . . . In hotels, in other people's houses, in their own house, he had gone, times without number, to find her purse. The purses themselves varied incessantly, but they were always fragrant with perfume, and always stuffed with money, bills and change. She liked to have plenty of cash on hand, and she could do it. She had so much, and he had nothing. Only his paltry allowance she doled out to him each month.

He found her bag on the hall table and brought it out to her; he stood by while she opened it and gave him a bill. An unendurable bitterness filled him that he must do this in the presence of the Sackett girl and Helen Phillips; glancing covertly at Josephine he saw in her thin face something mean, something miserly which he had never noticed before.

But he had to take the money and he had to bring her back the change. And he had to sit there, on the veranda, with all

that bitterness and that sickening fear and dread in his heart.

"Can't even be alone!" he cried to himself. "I need to be alone . . . To think about—Robert. . . ."

But if he didn't think about Robert, would this blow over . . . ? Or did things like this really happen . . . ? Things such as he read of in the newspapers with interest?

"It's not true," he said to himself. "It's—it's treacherous to think such things about Robert . . . Best friend I've got. And he *couldn't* have been such a fool. . . ."

That last word disconcerted him. That wasn't the way to look at it. A man who did a thing like that couldn't be called a fool. He would be a criminal of the worst sort. And Robert was no criminal. . . .

"I know that," he told himself over and over. "Good Lord! I've known Robert for years. He's no more capable of a dastardly crime like that than I am."

But if he could only forget what Robert had said that day in the birch glade. . . . The misery, the fury, the torment he had seen in his friend's face. . . . That would look bad, very bad. . . .

"But no one else heard!" he thought, with a relief so great that he sighed loudly. "No one else knows how he felt. . . . He's very well liked here. Who'd pay any attention to Acheson's flimsy evidence? Everyone thinks they were happy together."

"Lunch, Shawe!" his wife was saying. "What's the matter with you?"

She was being gay and sophisticated for Elsie Sackett's benefit; it was a manner that had always faintly embarrassed him, but to-day it was almost unbearable. He saw Elsie's clear eyes regarding her with a sort of wonder, and still worse, he saw that Miss Phillips did not look at her at all.

"Why can't Josephine be natural?" he thought. "If she were only different . . . If I could talk to her . . . If I could ever tell her I wanted to be alone. . . ."

That wish to be alone was growing and growing into a passion. Yet he dared not express it. If he went up to the bedroom, Josephine would follow him and ask what was the matter; if he went to the study, she would come there, if he went out alone, on foot, or in the car, she would accuse him

of Heaven knew what. He couldn't get away from her. He was never going to be able to get away from her. . . .

"Where's my purse, Shaw . . . ?" and she would give him what she felt like giving. He remembered that row on Saturday when she had threatened to stop his allowance, to prevent his using the car.

"No, I can't forget that," he thought. "I told her at the time that she'd gone too far. Some things a man can't forget. . . ."

His sullen anger surprised him.

"This worry about Robert's got on my nerves," he thought. "I've got to think what to do about Robert."

He could not. When he told himself that he must see Robert, something within him balked. He did not even want to talk any more about Robert with the Sackett girl.

"Fine girl," he thought to himself, mechanically. "Loyal to Robert."

But a disturbing girl; impossible to imagine what she might do or say.

"Now, a girl like Miss Phillips . . ." he thought. "You'd never have to worry about her. She has tact, and all that."

For a moment he allowed himself to imagine the relief of confiding in Miss Phillips. She would listen, he thought, with some extraordinary sort of understanding; she would somehow comprehend Whitestone as he did. But, of course, it was impossible. He could make no genuine confidences to her, or to anyone, without telling more than he intended.

"Well, I'll see Acheson!" he cried to himself in despair. "I'll have a talk with him. Try to make him realize . . . And there's one thing I'll tell him straight. If he's going to talk about his 'evidence,' the bathing-suit and the glasses, he needn't expect me to back him up. In fact, if things look troublesome for Robert, I'll lie. Robert would do it for me. No. . . . Then there won't be anything but this fellow Acheson's word. Just this theory . . ."

They went into the drawing-room after lunch; and through all his obsessive anxiety, he was vaguely aware of the constraint and awkwardness of the moment.

"If Mrs. Luff was the hostess," he thought. "Or Miss Phillips . . ."

He was standing by the mantelpiece, smoking a cigarette, when Elsie came up to him.

"Mr. Delancey!" she whispered.

He glanced apprehensively toward Josephine. She wouldn't like this girl whispering to him . . . She was looking, too . . . He attempted an amused, benevolent smile.

"You're going to see Bob, aren't you?" she went on and anyone could tell that she was speaking of something significant.

"I'll telephone him at once," he said.

He was glad to get out of the room, and glad he had thought of telephoning. He shut the door of the study and sat down, staring before him with a fixed frown, then he lifted the instrument and asked for Whitestone's familiar number. But no familiar voice answered. A man, slow and mild, said "Hello!"

"This Mr. Whitestone's house?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'd like to speak to him, please. Tell him it's Mr. Delancey."

"He's not here, sir."

"Who are you?"

"I'm from the McHenry Funeral Parlours, sir. Joe Perley."

With his fondness for friendly conversations, Delancey had acquired a large acquaintance in the little suburban town. He knew Joe Perley; he had often talked to him.

"Know where Mr. Whitestone's gone, Joe?"

"Well . . . Yes, Mr. Delancey," Joe answered, with a hesitation that Delancey noticed with a start of alarm.

"Where, Joe?"

"They took him to the police station, Mr. Delancey, about fifteen, twenty minutes ago."

"They—they . . ." said Delancey and had to wait a moment, to conquer that queer stammer. "I suppose—they want to question him. . . ."

"Well . . ." said Joe. "It seems they had a warrant, sir."

"A warrant to . . . ? You mean . . . ?"

"Well, you see, Mr. Delancey, I got a friend is a policeman. . . . It seems they found Mr. Whitestone's glasses down on the beach."

"No!" cried Delancey. "I mean—they couldn't arrest a man for anything so ridiculous. . . ."

"Well, you see, Mr. Delancey," said Joe, unable to conceal his immense pleasure in this unprecedented excitement. "The glasses was right near the place where Mrs. Whitestone was drowned. Somebody tipped off the police they was Mr. Whitestone's glasses and the police took 'em down to Charley Eden, and Charley, he could swear they was the ones he'd made for Mr. Whitestone, and, you see, Mr. Whitestone, he'd bin swearing up and down he'd never bin near the beach that morning."

"All right . . ." said Delancey. "All right, Joe. . . ."

CHAPTER X

A RING IS GIVEN

DELANCEY locked the study door and fell into a chair so heavily that the room shook.

"What'll I do?" he asked himself. "What'll I do? If they ask me questions, all right, I'll lie. I'll deny I ever saw that bathing-suit. I'll swear on my oath that Robert was wearing his glasses when we got to the studio yesterday morning. Oh, God, if I could only see him, just for a moment. . . . Tell him to stick to it that he was wearing his glasses when we came. Then he could say he dropped them when he went there later on. . . . If he'll only have the sense to say that, there'll be nothing but Acheson's story and what good'll *that* be, if I won't back him up? But *she* saw him too. I've got to have a talk with her quick. . . ."

Unlocking the door, he rang the bell and sent the housemaid to tell Miss Sackett he wanted to speak to her.

"She'll have to swear he was wearing his glasses," he thought. "She'll do it, for Robert's sake."

He felt so sick and shaken, he longed for another drink. But if he went to the dining-room, Josephine might catch him.

"Shawe," said Josephine's voice from the doorway. "I'd like to know what this means?"

He tried to control the fury of impatience that filled him. The police might come before he had a chance to speak to Elsie. . . .

"I sent for Miss Sackett," he answered. "I've got to speak to her."

"And why, may I ask?" she demanded haughtily.

"I'll tell you later. Send her along now. . . ."

"I shall do nothing of the sort! I don't like this at all. I shall—"

He rang the bell again and when the housemaid appeared: "I told you to get Miss Sackett here!" he cried. "Are you deaf, or what?"

"You needn't shout at poor Annie. She delivered your message, but I told Miss Sackett I'd come—"

"Tell Miss Sackett to come here *at once!*" he said, and as the girl hurried away, "Now clear out!" he said to his wife. "I've got to speak to her alone."

"I'll do nothing of the sort!" she began, when he advanced toward her, his face darkly flushed and a look in his eyes that made her retreat in haste. Elsie was coming down the hall.

"Come in!" he called to her and shut and locked the door after her. "Now, see here!" he said. "Please try to take this quietly. . . . Because you can help a lot. If you don't get excited. . . . Sit down. . . . I . . . I'm sorry to have to tell you . . ."

She remained standing, very straight.

"Do you mean that Acheson's begun?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, and looking at her valiant young face, he felt for a moment that he could not tell her that other thing . . . But he had to, for Robert's sake.

"Robert's—been arrested," he said.

She gave a little gasp, but she stood straight and steady as ever.

"Maybe the police have to do that, if someone makes an accusation," she said. "They'll just ask him questions, and then let him go. They *can't* keep him just because of what Hugh Acheson says."

He was distressed to see in her face no fear, no doubt, only a stern anger.

"You see . . ." he said, "the police found his glasses down on the beach. Near where it happened."

"Well, he went there in the afternoon."

"No. Don't you remember that we met—the ambulance before we got to the beach? And—and then, there's Acheson's statement that Robert wasn't wearing his glasses when we went to the studio that morning. . . . And—I'm afraid a good many people know he can't paint without them."

"You mean . . . !" she cried, the colour rising in her cheeks.

"Oh, never mind what I mean!" he answered, impatient in his torment. "Whatever way you look at it, it's bad for Robert. I've been thinking . . . The police are certainly going to ask you questions. They'll ask me, too. And I'm going to swear on oath that Robert was wearing his glasses when I saw him Sunday morning."

"It's—that serious?" she asked, and when he was silent, she read the answer in his look. "Then I'll do the same," she said. "If you're sure we've got to lie to get Robert out of this?"

"I'm sure," said Delancey.

And when he said that, he knew, very definitely, what was in his own mind. He had denied it before; he wished to deny it now, but he could not. He believed Robert to be guilty. He *knew* it.

"If you and I stick to that story," he said, "then there's only Acheson's word that he wasn't wearing them."

"Yes . . ." she said. "I see . . ."

There was a knock at the door.

"Well?" called Delancey.

"Shawe," said his wife. "Shawe! There's a policeman here to see you."

He flung open the door and came out. He had expected this. It had to come and he was glad it had come. He felt a craving for action. He wanted to do something definite in his friend's defence, even if it could be no more than the telling of a lie. He forgot Elsie, he would have forgotten Josephine if she had not caught his arm.

"What is it?" she whispered.

"It's about Robert," he answered, very low. "He's been ar-

rested. Hush! Keep quiet! Don't say anything *now*. Where is he?"

He was in the drawing-room, an ordinary enough policeman, stoutish, his face red this hot day.

"Officer Monahan, from the Greenvale station," he said, rising. "The chief'd like you to come along with me, sir, down to the station. Just to answer a few questions."

Delancey had not expected this. He had thought the interview would take place here, under his own roof. He had meant to be cool, perhaps a little jocular. But to be taken away . . .

He stood staring at Officer Monahan, with a great fear rising and rising in him. This stout, red-faced man was not like the traffic policemen he made jokes with. Even his appearance of good-humour seemed to Delancey a sinister thing, veiling a gross brutality. This was The Law. He knew then that his lies would not be the mere matter of effrontery he had thought. He saw that to carry this through required a courage, a quick wit which he had not got. There came to him one of those horrible little flashes of insight which from time to time shot across his mind, and, for a moment, convulsed it. He saw that he was clumsy, slow, easily bullied.

He was afraid. Elsie and Miss Phillips and his wife watched him leave with the policeman and he knew he was going to an atrocious ordeal.

Before Officer Monahan's car turned out of the drive, he saw young Acheson, driving toward them. He saw in young Acheson everything he himself wanted to be, and he gave a groan which he disguised as a cough.

Acheson had seen him and knew where he must be going and why. He did something very unusual for him; he accelerated with a jerk. But he had never in his life felt in such desperate haste. He pulled up before the Delanceys' house and ran up the steps to the veranda, and to his immense relief, he saw Helen Phillips there. She could be counted on to understand things without being told.

"Helen," he said. "Get Elsie Sackett for me, will you, please? I'm in devil of a hurry. It's important."

"Right!" said she and went into the house.

She found Elsie still in that pathetic "study," standing by

the window. "Miss Sackett," she said. "Hugh Acheson's here to see you in a frightful hurry."

"I don't want to see him!" said Elsie, turning toward her.

"But I should if I were you," said Miss Phillips, amiably. "Hugh really doesn't go dashing around like this for nothing. He's not—temperamental."

Her quiet good-humour had its effect upon the girl.

Hugh was sitting on the veranda railing, smoking a cigarette. He rose as she came out, and they looked at each other.

"I don't know if you've heard," he began.

"That Bob's in jail?" she said. "Yes, I've heard."

"You realize that you'll be questioned by the police?"

"I'm ready to be," she said. "And I'm going to."

"Wait, please! They may send for you at any moment. I've got to talk to you first. And I don't know how to do it. I don't know how to appeal to you . . . Is there anyone you care very much for—anyone you don't want to hurt?"

"Just Bob," she said.

"The aunt you spoke of? Mrs. Luff? Anyone you'd want to keep out of a mess—a headline scandal?"

"Nobody," she answered, coldly. "I see very well what you're getting at. You want me to go back on Bob, now that he's in trouble. And trouble that you caused."

"That's one way of looking at it," said Hugh. "Another way would be to think that he was—reaping what he's sown."

"I wish you the same," she said. "I hope with all my heart that some day you'll be repaid for your cruel, officious meddling. I know Bob's been foolish. He hasn't flattered people—like you and the Luffs. He hasn't made friends. He's not being humble enough now, when he's falsely accused of this preposterous thing."

"Elsie," said Hugh. "You've got to see . . . I told you what happened—what Whitestone has done."

"You told me what you thought he'd done."

"It's not me alone. The police wouldn't arrest him just because I suspected him."

"They might," said Elsie. "You've got up this plausible story . . . The wet bathing-suit that you say was Bob's, and he can't prove now that it wasn't. Those eye-glasses . . . I suppose you found them."

"Yes. I never was satisfied about the thing being an accident, and after I'd seen the wet bathing-suit, I knew. The police hadn't bothered to search the beach."

"But *you* did?"

"I did," he said.

"Perhaps," said Elsie, "you put those glasses there yourself. To make a nice, interesting case, with you for the hero."

"You have . . ." Hugh began, and checked himself, with something of an effort. "I want to help you," he said. "But I can't do anything, unless you'll realize how serious the thing is."

"Serious?" she cried. "Do you imagine I think it's funny for Bob to be in prison? With everyone against him? I know how hard it's going to be for him to clear himself, and how just having been accused is going to affect his whole future."

"I don't like saying this to you. But you'll have to face it sooner or later. The case against Whitestone is very much stronger than you think. It's . . ." Again he paused for a moment. "There's one thing you can do that would help him."

She looked at him, in an intent effort to understand, to discern if this were a trap, a new menace to Whitestone.

"Let's hear," she said.

"When the police question you, don't try to defend Whitestone. Let them think there was nothing but an insignificant sort of flirtation between you. And say that you're engaged to me."

"Engaged to you?"

"That ought to stop the gossip about you. The gossip you've done everything to increase."

"Do you think I care?" she demanded scornfully. "Let them gossip."

"It hasn't occurred to you yet, has it?" said Acheson, deliberately, "that this gossip is the thing that's going to damn Whitestone utterly."

Her eyes widened; she caught his sleeve.

"No!" she cried. "Don't say that! Oh, it couldn't be . . ."

He glanced down at her clutching hand; he opened his lips as if about to speak, and stopped, stood stiff and silent for a moment.

"If it can be proved that there was any sort of understanding between you and Whitestone," he said, "that would be motive enough on his part to satisfy any jury."

"I didn't see that. I didn't think of that."

"You haven't thought at all," said Hugh. "You've simply gone ahead, with no regard for yourself or for anyone else."

There was a cold anger in his voice that startled her.

"You think I've—" she began.

"I think you've been a dam' silly little fool," said Hugh.

She flushed and then grew pale again, the light of anger that had come into her eyes died out of them. She looked down at the floor.

"I guess you're right," she said, not with humility but thoughtfully. "But I can't deny all that now—"

"No. You've done your best to broadcast the fact that you and Whitestone are infatuated with each other. A jury won't care how much you and Whitestone deny it."

She was frightened now; she kept her glance upon the ground, and her face composed; but he saw that her breathing had quickened.

"Nobody knows, except Mr. Delancey," she said.

"You gave yourself away pretty thoroughly in front of Doctor Madison and the interne. Mr. and Mrs. Luff know. And I know."

"But you wouldn't . . . ?"

"You'd ask them and me—to lie under oath?"

She could detect no kindness, no compassion in his voice.

"Why did you say that?" she asked. "Why did you tell me to say I was engaged to you?"

"I suppose," said Hugh, "that I'm a fool myself. But I don't think I'd like to see you dragged through a thing like this. I don't think I'd like seeing your pictures in the tabloids: 'Murderer's Girl Sweetheart Loyal to the End' and so on."

"The dramatic part of it is," she said, "that I'm really going—to be loyal—" The unsteadiness in her voice made him wince.

"Very well," he said. "This is the way to do it. You've already mentioned the fact that I have influence and—money. . . . You can take advantage of them now. As my

fiancée, you won't be bothered much by anyone. And, of course, the case against Whitestone will be very much weakened, too."

"I don't understand. . . . You've taken all this trouble to build up a case against him, and now . . . It means that, after all the harm you've done, you're *not* really sure he's guilty."

"I know he's guilty," said Hugh.

"And you're willing to help him?"

"It's you I want to help. And unfortunately I can't help you without benefiting him."

She looked straight at him.

"Why?" she asked. "Why do you care what happens to me?"

"I'm afraid I can't explain," said Hugh returning her level glance. "Because I don't quite know why myself."

There was a moment of silence between them.

"I've brought you a ring," he said. "It belonged to my mother. It's small. I think it ought to fit you. I didn't buy a new one, because that could be traced, and we'd better say we fell in love at first sight, and got engaged the first evening I came here."

She took the ring he handed her and held it in the palm of her hand.

"I'm not going to cheat you," she said. "If I do this, it won't be to help myself out of trouble. It won't be because I care what people might say, or think about me. It'll be *only* for Bob's sake."

"I understand that."

"Maybe—" she said, "if you realized how I felt about Bob—how nothing he could ever do would make any difference—you wouldn't be so keen on my wearing your mother's ring."

He slipped the ring on her finger, and her hand closed over his. "You're a gentleman," she said. . . .

There was one thing Hugh had not said or suggested. But Elsie said it to herself. His words had been a staggering blow to her, but she had no thought of denying them, or of justifying herself. What he had said was true. She had wanted only to be loyal to Whitestone and to make her devotion obvious

not only to him but to the world. She could see now that she had been a fool, as Hugh said, and that she had done harm to Whitestone.

And with her native honesty and courage, she faced another possibility. It was so terrible that her heart grew cold with fear, yet she contemplated it steadfastly.

When she had given Whitestone that answer to his note, had she caused Rosalind Whitestone's death?

Hugh had said that a jury would consider Whitestone's infatuation for her a wholly satisfactory motive. What if it had been the actual motive of a crime?

At the sound of a footstep in the hall, she ran down the veranda steps and along a path, seeking in vain, in that ostentatiously cultivated garden, a place where she could be alone and unobserved. The dwarf firs, the neat lawn, the few trees, offered no refuge; she went to the iron fence that bordered the road, and leaning against it, looked back upon the course of her romance with Whitestone.

She did not spare herself.

"I thought I was going to be a sort of guardian angel to him," she reflected. "Well, suppose I was a devil? A devil who tempted him?"

She thought of Whitestone, with such intensity that she could see his face before her, and she asked herself that other question. Did she believe that Whitestone was capable of yielding to such a temptation? Did she believe him capable of murder? And in all sincerity she had to answer to herself:

"I don't know. . . ."

She had thought she understood him. She had seen that he was sensitive, unstable, pitifully vulnerable, and pitifully lonely. He was hurt and maddened by things another man would have ignored. He had been miserably unhappy with Rosalind, and curiously helpless against her. He could fly into a rage, but he couldn't really defend himself. He had that weakness, and that was his claim upon Elsie. For she was not weak. She had believed that her young vitality, her faith in him, would inspire him to work, to a new faith in himself. She realized now that it was possible she had inspired him to something else, something monstrous, awful.

"He could have done a thing like that," she thought.

It was possible. She admitted it.

"If he did," she thought, "it was my fault."

She stood, a charming figure in her white dress, a young girl in a garden on a Summer day, and she was enduring, as best she could, the worst hour of her life.

"Hugh Acheson is right," she thought.

Hugh represented all the qualities, the traditions against which she was in perpetual rebellion. He belonged with the rich, the powerful, the unassailable ones of the world, and she was heart and soul with the others, the oppressed, the mutinous. Yet she respected Hugh. She could not, in her pain, feel gratitude toward him at this moment, but she admitted the debt of gratitude.

"He's tried to help me all along," she thought. "He's been right all along. What he wants me to do is the only possible thing. . . ."

It must be done at once, too. She slipped his ring on her finger. It was a little loose, but not too noticeably so. The diamond glittered in the sun; she thought to herself that probably it was valuable. She marvelled for a moment that any woman could care very much for such things. Then, still with that icy coldness in her heart, she went back to the house.

It was curiously easy to play her part. She had never suspected before how easy it was. She found Josephine arranging flowers in a vase on the hall table, and she went up to her, smiling.

"You're the first I've told, Mrs. Delancey," she said, holding out her hand with the ring.

"My dear!" cried Josephine, with a delight that made her thin face radiant. She put her arms about the girl and kissed her with a warmth touching and surprising to Elsie.

There was, indeed, some honest kindness in that embrace, but there was so much more than that. This was to the unhappy Mrs. Delancey a supreme triumph, to be the first to hear this intimate news from one of what she called "that Luff set!" She was forever angry, sore, bitter against those people, yet forever drawn to them. Elsie's arrival had been salt to her wounds, for Elsie had come asking not for her but

for Shawe, and Acheson, when he came, had not troubled about her at all.

What was more, the girl's lovely youth had terrified her, she had thought amazing things, she had said some of them to Helen Phillips.

"She's been running after Shawe for the last two weeks," she had said. "I know the type! One of those so-called 'society girls'! With no respect for anything or anybody. . . . And Shawe's a fool about women. Any woman who flatters him a little . . ."

"Oh, I don't think you could call Elsie Sackett a 'society girl,'" Helen had protested. "And I'm quite sure she—" She had paused a moment. "I'm quite sure she wouldn't come here if she had designs on Mr. Delancey."

Her words, her tones, had added to Josephine's unhappiness. She felt that she had astonished the superior Helen Phillips. She felt that she was inept, stupid, an outsider. She had pretended to laugh.

"I'm foolish about Shawe," she had said. "He's so good-looking, isn't he?"

"Oh, very!" Miss Phillips had agreed. And what that tone meant, Josephine could not decide.

It seemed to her, too, that Miss Phillips received the news of Elsie's engagement in a very queer way. *She* did not kiss Elsie, did not show any warmth.

"Hugh's a lucky boy," she said politely.

But that was not going to spoil Josephine's triumph for her. It was under her roof that Elsie Sackett and the dazzlingly rich Hugh Acheson had become engaged, and she wanted that fact proclaimed.

"We must have a little dinner to celebrate!" she cried.

"Oh . . . !" said Helen Phillips.

Again Josephine had that feeling of having committed an unpardonable breach of taste or manners. But Elsie smiled, and Josephine determined to defy Miss Phillips. She became greatly daring.

"It would be nice to ask Mr. and Mrs. Luff . . ." she said, her voice a little unsteady with excitement. "I mean of course we must have Mr. Acheson, and he's staying with them. . . ."

"Shall I ring them up?" asked Elsie.

Nothing could have suited Josephine better, for she was at heart afraid of the mild Mrs. Luff. She remembered what she had described to Shawe as her "quarrel" with Mrs. Luff, at a lunch party some months ago. "Quarrel" had been a curious word to use for that little scene. Josephine had taken offense at some words of Mrs. Luff's, and had been haughty and implacable. She had intended Mrs. Luff to see that she was offended, but whether or not she had succeeded, she did not know. Nor could she imagine how Mrs. Luff would receive an invitation from her.

When Elsie telephoned, Mrs. Luff was in her drawing-room, one of a little party of four. Herself, her husband, Hugh Acheson and the Assistant Chief of Police from Greenvale. And never in her life had she enjoyed a party less.

The Assistant Chief of Police was a polite enough young man, but it was his job to ask questions not easy or pleasant to answer. Had Mrs. Luff noticed anything unusual about Mr. Whitestone when she dined there Saturday?

It was, thought Mrs. Luff, a curious and distressing thing that, the moment one was asked a direct question like that, and knew that the answer was important, it became almost impossible to answer. She really didn't know whether she had thought Whitestone's behaviour odd when she had actually been there, or whether she imagined now that he had been queer, because of what she had learnt in the meantime. She hesitated so long—and then she felt that the nice young policeman would, and must, think her answer calculated and disingenuous.

"I . . . Well . . . No . . . I can't remember that I noticed anything out of the ordinary. . . ." she said.

Had she noticed anything unusual about Mrs. Whitestone?

"No! Nothing!" Mrs. Luff answered, glad to be definite for once. Had she ever, at any time, observed anything unpleasant or strained in the relations between Mr. and Mrs. Whitestone?

"No! Never!" she answered, and then felt that her tone was much too vigorous.

And then the question had come for which she had been waiting in a tense dread.

"Now . . . This Miss Sackett that's staying with you . . . I'd like to have a word with her, if you please."

"She's not at home, just now," Mrs. Luff answered.

She forced herself to let her hands lie easily in her lap. She must not clench them. She must not be thinking of Elsie's name in the tabloids, Elsie's picture, Elsie on the witness stand. She must not be afraid of his next question.

"Will you tell me where I'll find Miss Sackett, please?"

How was she to answer that? Was she to tell the truth, to say that Elsie had taken her bag and run off Heaven knew where . . . ?

"Will you tell me—?" he was beginning again, patiently, when Hugh intervened.

"Mrs. Luff probably doesn't know," he said. "But Miss Sackett's still at Mrs. Delancey's. She'll be there over-night."

"Thank you, sir," said the Assistant Chief.

"If there's anything more I can tell you . . . ?" said Hugh, with the greatest willingness. "I could answer any questions you want without your having to see Miss Sackett. Miss Sackett and I are engaged, you know. And she and I have talked this thing over. . . ."

There was a brief silence.

"Thank you, sir," said the Assistant Chief again. "Now Mr. Luff. Did you at any time—?"

The telephone rang and Mrs. Luff, sitting near the desk, lifted the receiver.

"Mrs. Luff, please . . . Oh! It's Elsie, Mrs. Luff. . . . I wanted to tell you that Hugh and I are engaged. . . ."

Mindful of the Assistant Chief, Mrs. Luff said no more than "How nice!" Because there was so much here she only half understood, so much that might be dangerous.

To Elsie, that brief, amiable little comment was chilling; she went on with a certain reluctance.

"Mrs. Delancey thought it would be nice if you and Mr. Luff and Hugh came to dinner this evening . . . ?"

"Is that what Hugh would want?" thought Mrs. Luff. "Does he want this thing to be—very public . . . ?"

She glanced at him, but he was looking at the floor, his neat, fair head a little bent. She was afraid to ask him, perhaps he wished all this to seem prearranged.

"Thank her so much, won't you?" she said, careful to avoid any names. "We'll be delighted. . . ."

She was alert, pleasant, unruffled, while the Assistant Chief continued with his questions. But when he had finished and gone, she leaned back in her chair and was suddenly pale with fatigue, and strain. Her husband went to her side and laid his hand on her shoulder. She smiled up at him and raised her brows with an expression evidently known to him.

"Hmmm . . ." he said. "Well . . . ! I'll step out and get a breath of air."

Hugh was still sitting with his hands clasped between his knees, looking at the ground.

"Hugh," she said. "My dear boy . . . You're *very* generous to Elsie—very chivalrous."

He glanced at her with a smile.

"Isn't this just what you wanted?" he asked. "Isn't this what you expected, when you asked us both here at the same time?"

"It's not what I want—now," she answered, deliberately.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"I'm fond of Elsie," she went on. "I did think that perhaps you'd find her—different from other girls. But now—I wish with all my heart I'd never asked her here. I'm quite sure she didn't realize what she was doing, but after all, that can't make much difference. She's responsible for *all* of this."

"What?" he asked, sharply. "You mean—?"

"Hugh, there's no use pretending. It's—a horrible thing to say, but I'm going to say it. If Elsie hadn't come here, Mrs. Whitestone would still be alive."

"That's going to be the popular idea, of course. And it's unjust. Very unjust."

"You don't need to defend Elsie to me, Hugh. I'm not going to desert her. Both Joe and I want to do everything we can for her—within reason. But what you're doing—*isn't* reasonable. It's excessive . . . for you to announce that you're engaged to her just as this wretched scandal is about to break."

"Being engaged won't do me any harm," said Hugh. "And it'll do her a great deal of good. You can see for yourself that it's the only thing for her now."

"Hugh," said Mrs. Luff, not looking at him. "You're not—?"

"In love with her?" he said. "No."

Something in his tone troubled her; she looked at him and he caught her at it.

"D'you know," he said. "I wish I could be."

"Why, Hugh?"

"She's—magnificent," he said.

Mrs. Luff meditated upon that for a time.

"I see what you mean," she said. "But she's done dreadful harm—"

"That's unjust," he repeated. "Granted that she was rash and foolish—that she gave Whitestone encouragement. Still that doesn't make her responsible for his crime. The thing to remember is, that, long before he ever met Elsie, he was capable of what he did. He had it in him. He's violent and reckless by nature. There's no rock-bottom to his character. She didn't make him like that. If he'd never met her, still he'd have done something of this sort, at some time of his life."

"You can't know that, Hugh."

"Well, you see," he said. "I notice things. And I link up what I notice with past experiences. . . ."

"I'll admit you're very observant, Hugh. But you're very young, too. You can make mistakes."

"I know," he said, and his tone was apologetic. "But somehow I *don't* make mistakes about people."

"My *dear* Hugh!"

"I know how that sounds. But it's the truth. I could see that flaw in Whitestone the first time I ever set eyes on him. And it's in his friend, too."

"What friend?"

"Delancey."

"Really, Hugh!" she said, half-vexed. "That's a little too far-fetched. Delancey's the most harmless, good-natured man."

"He has no guts," said Hugh briefly.

"No. Very likely he hasn't. But what of it?"

"You remember when I started to sail down to Florida with Preston a couple of years ago?"

"And you were lost for three days. I'm not likely to forget."

"We had a fellow like Delancey along with us. Big, cheery sort of fellow, that same sort of traveling-salesman manner, nervous underneath it. When we were blown out of our course, things got pretty uncomfortable. The others took it as a matter of course. It was the sort of thing you knew might happen. The only one who made any trouble was that fellow like Delancey. He wanted a bit more than his share of everything. And before we were picked up, he collapsed."

"Very well," she said. "Perhaps poor Delancey wouldn't be very good in an emergency. I can't see that that justifies your very low opinion of the poor man."

"Well, y'see," said Hugh. "Thing is, you never know when there's going to be an emergency." He rose. "Dear Anabel Luff!" he said. "Make Elsie come back here with you, will you?"

She wished to look annoyed with him, but she could not. "I'll try," she said.

CHAPTER XI

AN ALLIANCE

ANABEL LUFF had not only been thoroughly disciplined in social conduct, but she was by nature courteous and amiable.

She was not able to like Mrs. Delancey, but if she were going to dine in Mrs. Delancey's house, she would do her utmost to please her hostess. She felt that a somewhat elaborate toilette would be expected of her and, fatigued and resigned, she put on a dark-purple frock with no back, and her diamonds round her neck, and called in the housemaid to help her with her soft, unmanageable sandy hair.

The result did not satisfy her. The strain of this day had left its mark upon her face. Sitting before her dressing-table, she applied a little rouge.

"I look like a harridan—whatever that is," she remarked.

"You probably are one," said her husband, gloomily. "I'd

certainly call it a harridan's trick to drag me out to dinner with those people. You've got a string showing."

"I don't wear strings," said Mrs. Luff. "It's a shoulder strap and I don't know anything to do about it."

"Hmm . . . Anabel! About this engagement . . . ?"

"What about it, Joe?"

"Nothing," said he. "Ready?"

Hugh was waiting for them in the hall. They all got into the car. And they were all a little too talkative, as if in haste to prevent even the briefest silence.

Mrs. Delancey welcomed them with a shade too much nonchalance. She was wearing a severe black frock that swept the floor, with long sleeves. It was an extremely expensive French model, and Anabel regarded it with sincere admiration. But Mrs. Delancey fancied her guest supercilious, she felt that everything was a little wrong, and that Mrs. Luff, actually the most casual of housekeepers, would notice certain little imperfections in her appointments. She detected, moreover, what she believed to be an insolent indifference in Anabel, an absent-minded way of answering her.

Indeed, this was one occasion when Mrs. Luff's tact and kindness had almost deserted her. She was so concerned about Elsie that it was difficult, almost impossible, for her to attend to anything else.

"Elsie doesn't look well . . ." she said to Mrs. Delancey.

The unhappy Josephine could see a slight even in that.

"She wants to make it plain that she hasn't come here to see me," she thought. "No, it's all her precious Elsie. And that Acheson talking all the time to Helen Phillips. As if this were a hotel." Aloud she said, with a smile: "Well, naturally . . . It's been an exciting day for her, hasn't it? First getting engaged, and then that policeman coming and asking her questions."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Luff. "Was there a policeman here?"

"For ever so long. I don't know why he needed to bother *her*. . . . And my poor husband! But of course he was that man's friend unfortunately. . . . They took him down to the police station and he hasn't come home yet."

Cocktails were served, too many and too strong, Mrs. Luff thought. They all sat drinking and smoking in the drawing-

room. Mrs. Luff talked, and Helen Phillips ably assisted her, but Hugh, always before so entirely to be depended upon, was useless now, and Mrs. Delancey was so odd and artificial. And Elsie sat there like a little ghost of her old vivid self.

"Shawe's so late . . ." said Mrs. Delancey. "Shall we give him another ten minutes?"

She could have cried from chagrin and disappointment. her dinner was spoiled. It was all wrong. Shawe was late and these other people were hateful, insulting. Mr. Luff hadn't said half a dozen words. . . .

A dreadful pause came. Then Mrs. Luff and Helen Phillips both spoke at the same time.

"Have you—?"

"Did you—?"

They looked at each other and laughed, and it seemed to Josephine a laugh that deliberately excluded her. She rang for the parlour-maid and ordered dinner served, in a haughty voice that startled Mrs. Luff. They had all risen when Delancey entered.

At first Mrs. Luff thought he had been drinking. He stood in the doorway, leaning against the frame. His hair lay damp on his forehead, his face was pallid and grimy, his blue eyes had a fixed, blank stare.

"Shawe!" cried his wife. "What's the matter?"

With a great effort, he turned his blank gaze to her.

"Police . . ." he said. "I mean to say . . ." He shuddered, and pulled himself together. "Gave me quite a grilling," he said, with something like his old manner. "I . . . it tires you. . . . Didn't know I'd have the p-pleasure of company. . . ."

"Cocktail, sir?" asked Hugh in his quiet voice, and without waiting for an answer, he brought a glass to Delancey.

Mrs. Delancey was recovering now from her alarm. She saw his condition as a fresh disaster to her dinner party.

"You'd better hurry and dress, Shawe," she said sharply. "We've all waited so long."

"Can't I put in a plea for Mr. Delancey this hot evening?" said Helen Phillips. "Can't he come as he is?"

Josephine wanted to cry. "No!" The idea of that pallid,

haggard, grimy creature at her charming table was unendurable. But she felt forced to yield.

"All right! Then just wash your hands," she said, in the tone of a mother forced to condone in public an offense she would not forget in private.

"Doesn't she *see* . . . ?" thought Mrs. Luff. "The man's really *ill*. . . ."

She felt genuinely alarmed for Delancey. After he had two or three drinks, the pallor of his face gave place to a dark flush. He became boisterous. His hands trembled.

"He's ill," she thought.

But Delancey was not ill in body. It was his soul that was mortally wounded. No man can endure life without self-esteem, and his self-esteem was stricken and dying.

He had a wonderful capacity for deluding himself, but he could not do that now. He had seen his own unhappy, naked soul. He had fought and had been entirely defeated. He had done his best, and his best was contemptible. He could not remember half that he had said, but he knew that he had betrayed his friend. The police had questioned him about the wet bathing-suit, and he had said he "knew" it was Rosalind's.

Had he actually seen it? Could he swear to it? What colour was it? He didn't remember. . . . Then how did he know it was Rosalind's . . . ?

He had been defeated about that, and defeated about the eye-glasses. He had asserted that he had seen Robert was wearing his eye-glasses when they had entered the summer-house on Sunday morning. He had said that he would swear to that.

Two men had sat in the sweltering room with him, both staring at him all the time, staring and staring, with cold, watchful eyes. . . . He had sat there, in a sweat of terror, had tried to assume an air of candid good-fellowship.

"We have a statement here from another witness that Whitestone did not always wear glasses when painting. To the best of your knowledge, is that true, Mr. Delancey?"

Suppose Elsie were the witness who had made the statement? Suppose she had grown confused under their questioning and admitted that Whitestone was not wearing

glasses . . . ? If her statement and his didn't agree . . .
Perjury . . .

"I . . . well . . . yes . . . Sometimes he didn't."

"But you're certain he was wearing them that Sunday morning?"

If Elsie had said no . . . ?

"Well. . . . Yes. Yes, he was."

"We found Whitestone's glasses on the beach that morning, Mr. Delancey."

"Well, good God, he could have more than one pair, couldn't he?"

They had abruptly dropped the subject and that was the worst thing they could have done. Had he said something fatally wrong . . . ?

"You're not concealing any facts that might help us?"

He had said no—no. He was a good citizen. He wanted to help them.

"Will you tell us all you know of the relations between Whitestone and his wife?"

"Very—pleasant . . ." he had answered, feeling the palms of his hands grow damp.

If they had let him take a rest, even ten minutes . . . if they had let him smoke. . . . But they wouldn't even give him a glass of water. . . . And he had known, all the time, what they were doing. They were breaking him down. He had heard of that happening to other men. Other men had been shut up like this and questioned without rest, without mercy, until they cracked. But they were gunmen, criminals, or men without strength of character, and of no standing in the world.

"You don't have to answer these questions, but you'd better. . . ."

He didn't have to and he *would not*. . . . His throat was dry. He wanted a glass of water, a cigarette. . . . One cigarette. . . . Those men never took their eyes off him. They would never stop, never, never stop until he told them. . . . No! He mustn't even think of that. They might read his mind. They might see those words written on his brain. "Whitestone said he was going to kill his wife. . . . Whitestone said he hated his wife. . . ."

He had flown into a violent rage.

"Now, see here! You fellows have no right to treat a decent citizen like this. I'm going. D'you hear me? And I'd like to see you stop me!"

He had risen, but they sat where they were, still looking at him. And the fact that his fury made no impression on them, frightened him. It was because they *knew* he was ineffectual. *They knew they were going to break him.* He stared down at them, and he had seen in their eyes their cool knowledge of their own strength, and his weakness.

"You were an intimate friend of Whitestone's, Mr. Delancey?"

"Yes, I was! I am!"

"Would you say that you were his most intimate friend?"

"I . . . Well. Yes. I'd say that."

"Then he'd have been more likely to make confidences to you than to anyone else?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Delancey. Did Mr. Whitestone ever tell you he was unhappy in his married life?"

"No. Never."

"You're sure of that? Try to remember."

"I'm sure."

"Then if you were his most intimate friend, how d'you account for the fact that he told several other people his married life was unhappy?"

"He—probably he was—just talking. He was—he is—a nervous—"

"Didn't he ever talk that way to you, Mr. Delancey?"

"No!"

"You never knew Whitestone and his wife to quarrel, on any occasion?"

"No."

"Mr. Delancey, do you admit that you were present at a picnic given by Mrs. Naomi Browne?"

They had heard about *that* quarrel, then; no doubt Naomi had told them. He shouldn't have made these flat denials.

"Oh, well . . . !" he had said, trying to laugh. "All married couples have—have tiffs now and then."

"You stated you had never known Whitestone and his

wife to quarrel. Do you wish to retract that statement?"

"I meant—not serious quarrels."

They had confused him, tormented him; he hadn't known what would be the best thing to say. And now, now he could not *remember* what he had said. O God! Had he told them—without intending to, without realizing . . . ? Had he in some way let them know about that thing Whitestone had said to him?

He wanted to die. He wanted the wearisomeness of dying to be over and to be already dead, buried, where no one could ever see him, and where he could never hear what they said of him. Everything that makes life good or even tolerable, had been taken from him. He felt eviscerated, nothing but a shell, with no manhood in him.

He made an effort to keep that shell intact, to smile at his guests. But it was not possible.

"I've got to go and kill myself," he thought. "I'm a murderer! I've killed Robert."

He pushed back his chair.

"Excuse me," he said politely. "I've got to go and . . ." He stopped just in time. Of course it wouldn't do to tell them. . . . They'd try to stop him.

"Shawe, if you'd eat something . . ." said his wife, with that fretful little frown of hers.

"Yes . . ." he said, absently, and hurried out of the room, stumbling and unsteady on his feet. He imagined he heard Josephine's voice following him all the way down the hall.

"Shawe! Shawe! . . ." That petulant, dissatisfied voice. Dissatisfied with him. . . . Like everyone else. . . . He pulled down the blinds in his study and sat down before the desk. His idea had been to shoot himself at once, before there was any more trouble. He had his Army revolver. . . . Never had got across to France. . . . He took out the gun and laid it on the desk.

He knew he was not going to shoot himself.

"It's—the noise . . ." he thought. "Must be deafening. . . ."

He could not endure that awful, shattering roar that would rush into his head, go spreading and spreading

through his brain. It might go on indefinitely—even after they thought he was dead. . . .

Someone knocked at the door and he covered his face with his hands and cried. "Can't they let me alone . . . ? Can't I have even an hour . . . ?"

He made up his mind not to answer. He didn't care who it was. There was no one on God's earth he wanted to see, could endure seeing. . . . Tears ran through his fingers. . . . He was so tired, so unutterably tired and wretched.

Elsie's voice addressed him. Somehow she had got in. He must have forgotten to lock the door.

"I wish you'd go away . . ." he said. "I don't feel well."

"I will, Mr. Delancey," she answered, in a subdued voice. "Only, I just wanted so very much to know if they'd let you see Bob?"

He took down his hands and looked at her. His face was grimy, his wet lashes gave to his blue eyes a singularly innocent and pitiable look.

"No," he answered, politely. "They didn't."

It was at this moment that Josephine came to the door of the study, and stood outside listening. If the two persons inside the door were wretched, she was equally so. If they were driven by pain and dread, so was she.

"I know you don't want to talk now," the girl went on, "but—Oh! You're the *only* one!"

"I'm not," said Delancey. "Not really."

He was scarcely aware of what he said; as an aftermath of his collapse in the hands of the police that afternoon he was assailed now by a violent desire to break down again, to confess again to this young creature with the soft voice. He was struggling against that desire with whatever strength he had. He tried to light a cigarette, but his hand shook so that he could not. Elsie came to his side, and struck a match and held it for him. He could not thank her, for fear of more tears.

"You *are* the only one," she said, and seeing him so greatly troubled and shaken gave her the strength of despair. "Did you think my getting engaged to Hugh Acheson meant . . . ? It's *nothing*! Oh, don't you see that you and I have got to stand together against everyone?"

"We can't," said Delancey. "There's nothing we can do now."

"Please, please, don't look at it that way! Please don't be hopeless! I've been thinking and thinking . . . What we need now is money. You have money."

"I haven't," he said. "I have no money of my own. Not a cent."

"Well, you can get it, somehow," she said.

That was all Josephine could stand. She had heard Elsie tell Shawe that he was "the only one," that her engagement to Acheson meant nothing to her. She had heard Elsie urging Shawe to get money from her, his wife. And he would try. He would come to her, in the old way, with plausible, lying reasons. . . . She ran up the stairs to her own room and flung herself face down on the bed. Her guests would be surprised by the absence of herself and her husband. Let them be!

"Damn them!" she cried. "I hate them all. . . ."

Her husband in that study of his "very own," which had proved so poor a sanctuary for him, was undergoing a new ordeal. He was able to endure it, because exhaustion had numbed him.

"Your wife will let you have some money," said Elsie.

"No," he answered, and made the admission without shame.

"But don't you see . . . ? We've got to get the best possible lawyer for Bob. There's no one but you to do that. You and I are the only ones who have faith in him."

Their eyes met, and the look on her face made Delancey straighten up in his chair.

"Of course we have faith in old Robert," he said in his old hearty voice. "We know, even if no one else does."

"Yes!" she assented.

They were silent for a moment, and their unspoken thought was plain to them both. Neither of them had any faith in Whitestone's innocence. Neither of them had even a hope that he might be innocent.

"It's my fault," thought Elsie. "I made Bob do it."

And Delancey thought:

"If he goes to the chair, I've sent him there. I gave him away to the police."

He rose and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Don't you worry, little girl," he said. "I'll get the money and we'll find the smartest lawyer there is. We'll get Robert out of this."

It was the one thing he could do, the one atonement he could make. He would go to Josephine, he would ask her, beg her to let him have what money he needed. He would abase himself, do anything, to give Whitestone that chance. He would endure anything she chose to say, suffer anything.

"Don't you worry, Elsie!" he said. "I'll see to it." He paused. "But I think you'd better not stay here—not for the present," he said.

"Why?"

"I'll explain later," he said, and was pleased to see that his grave tone impressed her. He did not wish her to know the truth. He knew well enough that Josephine would make trouble about Elsie very soon. She would accuse him of more and more outrageous things. She had been in a bad humour this evening, and Elsie, being young and pretty, would be her pretext for a fresh attack. He really couldn't stand any more.

"We can't have guests," he thought. "We can't have any sort of normal, pleasant life. No."

"Is it really important for me not to stay here?" asked Elsie.

"It is," he said.

"But where shall I go?"

He pretended to think that over for a moment.

"You'd better go back with Mrs. Luff," he said. "You can see that that looks so much better. And just now, appearances are of the greatest importance. . . ."

He was not sure whether his words had any sense or coherence. Only he wanted Elsie to go. He wanted to be alone, to think, to plan some way of getting money from Josephine.

And all the time, he knew he wouldn't get a penny.

CHAPTER XII

DELANCEY'S CAREFUL PLAN

MISS PHILLIPS was not disconcerted to find herself obliged to play hostess. She made no attempt to explain the absence of the Delanceys, and no excuses for them. She was not responsible for them, and the Luffs and Hugh Acheson knew that.

"I'm pretty well fed up with the Delanceys," she thought. "I'm going home to-morrow."

The Sackett girl had likewise disappeared, and that seemed to make Hugh uneasy. But there was nothing to be done about it. Miss Phillips had no intention of running about the house looking for her.

"Very likely they're all three having a tremendous row somewhere," she thought. "Josephine's desperately jealous of Elsie. And they're like that."

Presently Elsie reappeared. She looked miserable enough but, thought Miss Phillips, it's very hard to tell with kids like that. Almost impossible to know whether they're sulking, or really suffering. Mrs. Luff rose to take leave almost at once.

"Miss Phillips," she said. "Will you tell Mrs. Delancey . . . ?"

Their eyes met.

"Tell her anything you can think of," murmured Mrs. Luff. "I don't know . . ."

As soon as they were gone, Helen Phillips had one sole idea, and that was to get up to her room before either of the Delanceys would capture her and force her to listen to their domestic troubles.

"I'm sorry for that man," she thought. "But I'm afraid he's never going to know it."

She mounted the stairs apprehensively, dreading that one of them would call to her from below or that a door would open above. The house was quiet, remarkably quiet. Either their "row" was a singularly repressed one or it was over

now. No one intercepted her. She reached her room and with a sigh of relief, locked the door.

"*What* an evening!" she thought. "Poor Shawe looked horrible. . . . The whole evening was horrible." The sound of a window being closed made her start. "It's a little horrible even now," she thought. "Why did I ever accept that ferocious woman's invitation . . . ? Rhetorical question, dear Helen. . . . You did it to save money. . . . But I'm going home to-morrow to be poor and proud. . . ."

She put on her pajamas and lay down on the bed to read. But she was not destined for a peaceful evening. It was not ten minutes later that she heard a "row," such as she had never heard before. A door slammed and Josephine's voice cried in a shrill scream:

"This is the end! Do you hear me? I've *finished* with you. You liar! You thief!" She ended with a gasp and was silent for a moment. But no one answered her. She might have been alone on earth. "Not another penny, do you get out of me! Not while I'm alive and not when I'm dead, either. I'll change my will to-morrow. You can starve if you're too lazy to work. . . . I won't stay another night under the same roof with you. I'm going—now!"

Still there was no answer, no response of any sort. Miss Phillips, sitting up in bed, shivered a little with dislike for that horrible voice and the horrible words it uttered.

"Of course, if he had the spirit of a mouse," she thought, "he'd stop her if he had to choke her. But I'm sorry for him, all the same."

"I'm going now!" Josephine went on. "And I'm going to tell your precious Mrs. Luff why, too."

The door slammed again and Miss Phillips leaned back on the pillow. There was a knock at the door.

"I don't think I'll answer," she said to herself.

The knock was repeated, and Delancey spoke her name, in a low voice. She still hesitated for a moment, but some emotion, pity, or perhaps mere politeness, made her get up reluctantly and open the door. Delancey stood there, a deplorable spectacle, with a pale, dirty face, and disordered hair; yet he had a new composure about him which was curiously impressive.

"I'm sorry to bother you, Miss Phillips," he said, "but Josephine is in a bad state. I think maybe she'd listen to you. She won't, to me. If you'll just make her understand that I'm leaving the house at once; there's no need for her to go. Fact is, she can't go rushing off Lord knows where."

"I don't think she'll listen to me," said Miss Phillips. "I think any interfering will really make things worse, Mr. Delancey. There's—"

As she stood in the open doorway, she heard Josephine's voice again, shut in her own room now, but quite audible. She was telephoning.

"Hello! Hello! Well, keep on ringing! Hello! I want to speak to Mrs. Luff. No, thank you, Mr. Luff. I've got to speak to your wife. I tell you I've *got* to! It's urgent. . . . Mrs. Luff? This is Josephine Delancey. I want to tell you that I'm leaving my husband and it's that Sackett girl who's the cause of it. I heard her myself: 'You're the only one! Oh, you can get money for me!'"

Her voice in a falsetto mimicry of Elsie's was not agreeable to hear. Helen Phillips glanced sidelong at Delancey, and she was surprised by his look, a grave, quiet, untroubled look that gave to his usually rather simple face a virile handsomeness.

"He's a *man*, after all," she thought, wondering.

"Hello! Hello! Give me that number again!" Josephine was crying. "I *know* they're there. . . . Hello!" But she got no satisfaction, and in a moment she ceased trying and flung open her door.

"So you're there!" she said to her husband.

"I'm just going," he answered evenly. "I was asking Miss Phillips if she'd talk to you. . . . Good-night!" He turned away and walked off down the hall, and he never had had that erect, lithe bearing before.

"He never said one word to that harpy," thought Miss Phillips. "He's controlled his temper marvelously. . . . Yes, he's really a *man*."

In the lower hall Shawe Delancey picked up his hat.

"I'm going to kill her," he thought.

He sighed with relief as he closed the front door after him and stepped out into the night air that felt like cool, sweet

water against his face. "I've got to kill her," he thought. "There's no other way. . . ."

He set off down the gravel drive with his hands in his pockets, his head thrown back so that he could look at the stars.

"Makes me realize," he meditated, "how petty human affairs are."

Then he remembered that Robert, his friend, could not see the stars, not to-night and perhaps not ever again.

"Unless I can help him!" he thought. "And I can't do that unless—"

Well, unless Josephine died, and died before she had a chance to alter her will.

"I mean—" he thought, "looking at it logically . . . What good is she to anyone? She's not even happy. She makes even herself miserable. If she goes on living, look what happens. I won't be able to do a thing for Robert. Poor Elsie'll be dragged into Lord knows what, a divorce case, perhaps. And the beast Josephine would tell everyone that Elsie was the cause of her leaving me. I've got to do it."

Again he thought of Robert in a cell, and thought of those two policemen. . . .

"No!" he thought. "My God! I couldn't stand anything like that again. I'd rather kill myself."

But he felt so well, so strong, so sane and clear-headed. It was wrong. A monstrous injustice for *him* to die. He had wronged no one; on the contrary, he had been wronged. He had been humiliated, insulted, injured in every way.

"Robert was careless," he thought. "Very careless."

He felt an overwhelming pity for his friend, a sorrowful indulgence.

"If you're going to do a thing like that," he thought, "you can't be careless. I believe it could be done so that no one would ever find out. . . . It could be done. . . . It ought to look like an accident. Of course, that's what poor Robert tried to do. . . . But he was careless. If he hadn't dropped his glasses . . ."

He wanted to sit down quietly and think. His brain was working marvelously well, but his body was weary.

"I'll go to a hotel," he decided and then remembered that

he had no luggage and no money and that he was dirty and dishevelled. There was nowhere he could go. He was here with no roof over his head, no food, not even a clean collar.

"It's her fault, blast her!" he thought, in a sudden rage. "I can starve, can I? If I'm too lazy to go to work! We'll see about that!"

He sat down on the damp grass under a tree and felt in his pocket for a cigarette. One left. And *she* wouldn't let him have any more, wouldn't let him have food, or shelter, or anything.

"I want to get it worked out before I finish this smoke," he thought. "Now, let's see. . . . She's going to get run over."

That idea came without the slightest effort; he felt a sense of relief and comfort to find his brain working in this clear, easy fashion.

"First thing is to establish an alibi for myself. . . . There mustn't be any way to connect *me* with the accident."

He saw exactly how he could do it. He had a key to the garage, he would get the car out, push it out quietly so that Linney should not hear him. He knew an excellent place to hide it, half a mile from the house. Then he would go back to the house and he would find a pretext to let Miss Phillips know he was there.

"I'll cut my hand," he thought, "and ask her to tie it up."

The car would be missed in the morning, but no one would connect him with that. He would stay in his own house all night. He would have a bath and a shave, dress himself decently, and take care that the housemaid saw him before he left in the morning. He would get his commutation ticket and go into town, reaching the office before anyone else was there. Then he would telephone to Josephine; he would tell her he was at the Station Hotel in Greenvale and ask her to meet him on the old bridle path. He couldn't fix the hour now, not until he had a time-table. He would have to use the right tone with her. Well, he could certainly do that. He might say he would kill himself if she refused this one last interview. But how was he to make sure she would tell no one she was going to meet him?

For a moment that difficulty worried him, and then he

had a genuine inspiration. He repeated to himself the very words he would use, in the very tone, low and hurried.

"When I left you last night, I was *desperate*. Felt I didn't care what happened to me. I don't care now, either, if you've thrown me over. But I didn't realize I was dragging you into disgrace. It's all right for me. I've got my gun. I'm going to blow my brains out. But I don't want you in it. I don't want you in the newspapers as the widow of a thief."

He regretted the word "widow": It sounded cynical. But it couldn't be avoided.

"It's only a small matter," he would continue. "If I can see you before the police get me, you can set it straight, without any publicity. Meet me on the old bridle-path, and for God's sake, don't let anyone suspect where you're going."

His mind, working so lucidly to-night, saw a great many flaws in this tale, but they were not, he thought, of any real importance. Josephine was never logical at any time, and this tale told to her in a hurry would confuse her beyond the possibility of analyzing it. She would catch the salient points. In the newspapers as the widow of a thief! Blow my brains out! He knew Josephine so well. He was certain that she would come, and come without suspicion, to meet him so near her own house, in broad daylight.

She would come and he would be ready for her. The bridle path was almost never used. The chances were a hundred to one against anyone else being there. "And I've got to take some chances," he thought, philosophically.

He proceeded. After he had telephoned to Josephine from the office, he would borrow ten or fifteen dollars from one of his friends in the city and this would not only supply him with the cash he needed but would establish, if not an alibi, at least a supposition that he was not in the vicinity of Greenvale. Then he would return there, not from the Grand Central where he would be recognized, but by a little branch line that left from One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street. At the end of this line, he would take a bus and then a taxi and then he would walk, taking by-roads until he reached the spot where the car was hidden. Close to the bridlepath that was. He would start the engine and when he saw Josephine coming. . . .

That part of it was not agreeable. He had too vivid an image of her on that narrow path lined with trees. He would have to come toward her, he would have to see her face and she his.

"But it'll be all over in a moment," he thought. "I won't even have to touch her."

Somehow, that seemed to him a most important mitigation. Somehow it seemed to rob the act of any brutality. The cigarette was smoked down so low now that it burned his fingers; he threw it away and rose, sighing. It was a sigh of relief, for now that he had definitely wished the thing, and planned it, it was as good as done.

He walked lightly across the grass to the garage, opened the door with his key. It was easy to push the car out, easy to coast down the hill, and once in the highway, the engine started easily. He had the feeling of doing all this a second time, and with the confidence of a rehearsal behind him. He hid the car, and walked back to the house, let himself in with his latch key, and re-entered his study. Now he had to cut his hand, and that was more difficult than he had expected. Very much more difficult. . . .

He tried, even to scratch the back of his hand with his pocket knife, and at the first touch of the steel, he flinched. He sat miserably staring at the knife; he tried to think of doctors who so boldly cut into living flesh. . . . He took a drink and was steadier, another drink, several more, and at last he made a sort of lunge and cut, deeper than he meant.

It didn't hurt in the least. "Or maybe," he thought, "I'm not very susceptible to pain. Good nerves. . . . Very few fellows—could do a thing like this. . . ."

His hand was bleeding profusely, and he was proud of it. He went upstairs and knocked at Miss Phillips' door. When she opened it he thought how attractive, how neat and cool and young she looked, in a striped dressing-gown belted about her slim waist.

"Hurt my hand a little," he said. "I wondered if you'd be kind enough to tie it up for me."

She stared at him so. . . . The blood was dripping from his hand on to the floor, and she stared at him so, her face grown white as paper. . . .

Mrs. Luff saw that she could do nothing with her husband that morning. For a moment she wondered if she could manage to cry, but she had long ago got out of the habit of that, and doubted if she could do it convincingly. Moreover, she was very tired, so tired that she was almost willing to give up to the unmanageable man.

"But I think it's very unkind and very *wrong*," she said.

Her husband stood beside the bed, looking down at her.

"I wish you could see yourself!" he said sternly. "You look—like the devil."

"When I've had my coffee—"

"Nonsense!" he said. "It'll take more than coffee to set you right. I won't have it! That damned woman ringing you up in the middle of the night, and the police in the house. . . . You're not young any more—"

"Joe!"

"Well," he said. "Sorry if I was tactless. . . . As far as I'm concerned, you're better-looking—you're nicer than you ever were."

She reached for his hand.

"Just leave this to me," he said. "You know I won't be harsh with the confounded kid. I'm sorry for her. But she'll be better off at home, and, after all, *you're* the one to be considered. You come first."

"Joe . . ." she said. "Of course, a great deal of it is because of my training, but you really are very satisfactory."

"Here's Lotta with your breakfast," he said. "For Heaven's sake, eat something. I'll be back presently, to see . . ."

On the way downstairs he lit a cigarette, the first time he had smoked before breakfast in years. But he hadn't felt so thoroughly upset in years, either.

Last night there had been that telephone call from the Delancey woman, waking them out of their sleep. Anabel had refused to repeat what Mrs. Delancey had said, but her voice had been so loud that he had heard most of it. She was leaving her husband on Elsie's account.

"Crazy . . ." he thought, "the girl wouldn't look at Delancey. Whatever else you might say about her, she's certainly no coquette. But she's a trouble-maker. . . ."

When they had got home from Mrs. Delancey's very awk-

ward and uncomfortable dinner-party, there had been four reporters waiting for them. And more would surely follow. Elsie was the magnet who drew them. Elsie was the "heart-interest" in this cruel and ugly crime. The fact that she admitted being engaged to Hugh Acheson made it worse. The newspaper men were singularly well aware of the interest she had, or had had, in Whitestone. Their questions showed that; and after the inquest, thought Luff, nothing could keep them quiet about it. Now what they wanted were photographs and details about "Millionaire Polo Player's Romance," and Elsie, while very brief with them, had not seemed abashed.

Luff wondered about this. Certainly the girl had been infatuated with Whitestone. Did the very suspicion that he had committed murder make her turn instantly against him—and toward Hugh? If that were so, he ought to be pleased, and yet he wasn't. When he saw her sitting at the breakfast table, he felt sorry for her, because she looked so very young and so very unhappy, but he wasn't pleased.

"Altogether . . ." he thought. "First she leaves Anabel—simply walks off, to stay with the Delanceys. Then she decides to come back. . . . 'Do you mind Mrs. Luff?'—That's all. No apologies . . . Doesn't care . . ."

She "cared" about something, though, to look as she looked this morning. When he spoke to her, his voice was gentle.

"Elsie . . . Ha! . . . My dear girl . . . I've been thinking . . . These reporter fellows are just beginning, y'know. . . . It's going to be . . . It seems to me, Elsie, that you'd better leave this neighborhood for a bit. . . ."

"But do you mean—?"

"Go home for a bit," he said. "Back to your aunt."

He almost regretted having spoken, but then he thought of Anabel, and did not regret it.

"I'll—have to be here for the—inquest," said Elsie.

He was silent, and so was she, for a considerable time.

"I know how it is," she said, presently. "I know it's horrible for Mrs. Luff. . . . But I can't leave here—just yet. I can stay at the inn."

"No," he said. "No. You mustn't stay there, alone. . . . Thing is—Anabel wasn't going to tell you, but I'd think you'd rather know. . . . Mrs. Delancey . . . Woman's half out of her mind. . . . She rang up last night. . . . Very unpleasant. . . . You mustn't stay here, my dear girl."

"What did she say?"

"That doesn't matter, Elsie. She's not the sort—"

"She's been nice to me."

"Well, she's *not* nice to you!" he said. "Do be a good girl and promise me you won't communicate with the Delanceys in any way."

"I've got to see Mr. Delancey."

"Merciful Heavens!" he cried. "You've—You must not see Delancey."

"I've got to."

"Look here! Mrs. Delancey telephoned last night. Said she was leaving her husband. Said it was on your account. . . .

"On my account?" Elsie repeated scornfully. "How perfectly insane!"

"It's the kind of insanity that leads to very unpleasant results, my dear girl."

She looked down at her plate for a moment, then she raised her dark eyes to his face. "I'll try my best not to worry you and Mrs. Luff," she said.

"That's not the point. You've got to think of your own reputation, Elsie."

"I don't—" she began, when Hugh came into the room.

"Sorry I'm late!" he said. "I overslept."

It seemed to Luff that both Hugh and Elsie were almost inhumanly untroubled by what was taking place about them. Their hostess of a few nights ago murdered, their host in prison, a public scandal involving both of them—yet they were so cool. . . .

"Nice morning, sir," said Hugh. "I'm going to give myself one more holiday. Like to take a drive, Elsie?"

"All right, thanks," she answered.

"What about making a start now?" he said. "I've got the car outside."

"She hasn't finished her breakfast," objected Luff. "And you haven't begun yours."

"We can always get something to eat. . . . This is the best part of the day. . . . Ready, Elsie?"

"One moment," she said, and finishing her second cup of coffee, rose, and went into the hall.

"Back door," said Hugh.

She followed him through the pantry, and through a side door to the path the tradesmen used.

"Why?" she asked.

"Reporters," he said. "And I— There's something I'd rather tell you, before you hear it from someone else."

"Something bad?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered. "I'm sorry but—yes."

They went through a gap in the hedge. Two men sprang forward. "Miss Sackett!" cried one. "What message . . . ?"

Hugh started the car, a camera clicked.

"Got us," said Elsie. "Well?"

"You'll have to know," said Hugh. "Whitestone confessed last night."

He did not look at her but kept his eyes on the road before him. His lean hands were steady on the wheel.

"It may not be genuine," she said, after a pause. "I've read about the police bullying people into confessing things they haven't done."

"This is genuine," said Hugh. "I talked to his lawyer."

He had made no attempt to break the news gently, he was not trying in any way to minimize it. Luff would have thought his way surprisingly crude, even brutal. But it suited her, it was as she wanted it to be. His direct and quiet manner was infinitely more pleasing to her than any expression of sympathy.

"Has he a good lawyer?" she asked.

"Yes. Smart fellow. Vesey is his name."

"Do you think he has much of a chance?"

"No," said Hugh.

"If he had a better lawyer?"

"Vesey's good. He's advising Whitestone to plead guilty . . . then he'll try to prove emotional instability and extreme provocation."

"What—what will they bring forward as—the extreme provocation?"

"I think it can be proved by the Brownes and one or two others . . . that Whitestone felt his wife was antagonistic to his work. Made him take that job, and so on. . . ."

"Not good enough," said Elsie.

"It's the best that can be done for him."

"No," she said. "If there was—another sort of provocation, he'd have a better chance."

He turned the car up a lane, and stopped it.

"I'm paying Vesey," he said. "Whitestone has nothing. He'd have had to take a lawyer appointed by the court."

"You lent me a thousand dollars—" she began.

"I stopped payment on that cheque."

Her lip trembled, but there was no softening of her tone.

"You're not—really giving him his chance," she said. "I've read newspapers. I know how those things are. If it comes out in court that he—loved me—and I him—there'll be a thousand times more sympathy for him."

"No," said Hugh. "The average man would feel pretty much as I do, about that. And what I feel for Whitestone now isn't—sympathy."

"You're—hard," she said. "Hard—and utterly intolerant."

He glanced at her, and found her eyes shining with tears. But she *would not* shed them.

"There's another thing," he said. "Whitestone himself wants to keep you out of this."

"I don't want to keep out of it. It's all my fault."

"I had an idea you'd be thinking that. But you're wrong. Look at it honestly. He's a good ten years older than you. Whatever he is, he was, long before you ever saw him."

"I encouraged him."

"Not to do—that."

"I don't know," she said. "He may have thought . . ."

The tears were running down her cheeks now.

"People with money enough—don't go to the electric chair . . ." she said. "If you'll—save him from that—I'll marry you now—to-day. . . . I'll do anything you say."

"I don't want to marry you, Elsie," he said.

That startled her.

"You thought that—in the course of time I'd—get fond of you," she said, challengingly.

"I didn't. I know dam' well you'd never get fond of me."

"Then it was—just nobleness?" she demanded with scorn.

"If you want to call it that. I like you. I've got a sort of admiration for you. I'm glad of a chance to help you, especially as it doesn't mean any particular trouble for me."

She put her arm round his neck, drew down his head, and kissed him on the mouth, a kiss that astounded him, that entirely destroyed for a moment his admirable composure.

"Elsie!" he said.

"That's how I feel about you," she said. "I don't *love* you. I've never loved anyone but Bob. I guess—I never will. But I'm fond of you. You're a thousand times finer man than Bob. You're a thousand times stronger, and kinder and more understanding. But he's the man I love. And even if I never see him again, it's the same."

They sat hand in hand, in silence, for a long time.

"You've got to be merciful to people like Bob," she went on. "When you think . . . Oh, it's almost *unbearable!* What he's enduring—what he's got to endure—is so much worse for him than it would be for anyone like you. Last night, when I thought of him in a cell . . ."

"I'll tell you a cure for that," said Hugh. "When you find you're feeling too sorry for Whitestone, think of his wife."

She moved away, and then sighed.

"She's out of all her troubles," she said. "But other people aren't. I've made trouble and misery for everyone, right and left. . . . Mr. Luff told me something new this morning. Mrs. Delancey telephoned last night that she was leaving her husband and that it was on my account."

"*What!*" said Hugh.

"It's ridiculous," said Elsie, sighing again. "He never gave me a thought any more than I did him. But I just seem to be unlucky for everyone else."

"We'd better be getting back now."

"I can't stay at the Luffs' any longer, Hugh. Mr. Luff said so."

"Stay to lunch, anyhow. And we'll talk about it later."

"Why are you in such a hurry?"

"I've got something to do," he answered. "But I shan't be very long."

He drove back as fast as he deemed advisable, and while Elsie was on the veranda, he went in search of Mrs. Luff.

"Please look after Elsie!" he said. "Until I get back, anyhow. Then if she's a nuisance—I'll find a place for her."

"Hugh!" cried Mrs. Luff, bitterly hurt. But he did not hear her, or at least he did not heed her. By the time she reached the window, his car was speeding down the drive.

He had made up his mind that somehow Josephine Delancey was to be stopped from including Elsie in her domestic scandals. He was ready to go to very great lengths to accomplish this. He had even spoken in hostility to his beloved Mrs. Luff.

"That's queer, too . . ." he thought.

He drove up to the Delanceys' house and rang the bell with more vigour than is customary.

"I want to see Mrs. Delancey, please," he said to the parlour-maid. "Tell her it's Mr. Acheson."

"Mrs. Delancey's not in, sir."

"Expect her soon?"

"I couldn't say, sir," the girl answered and the hesitation in her manner dismayed him. Had the wretched woman left already, gone to spread her poisonous rumours all over the place?

"Mr. Delancey in?"

"I—don't know, sir. I'll see."

She admitted him to the drawing-room and went off, and Hugh stood quietly and tried to think quietly. Almost immediately Delancey came into the room, unsteady on his feet, a witless grin on his face. No use trying to talk to *him* now.

"Will you tell me when you expect Mrs. Delancey home?" he asked.

"S—sorry . . ." said Delancey. "Couldn't. . . . N-no-body knows where she went."

"You mean she's left? Gone away?"

"Didn't take any bags. Didn't even take a hat. . . . Just gone. Dis—dis'peared."

CHAPTER XIII

WHERE JOSEPHINE WENT

WHATEVER Acheson felt, he kept to himself.

"Afraid I don't quite understand," he said. "Do you mean that Mrs. Delancey isn't coming back here?"

"Dis'peared."

At this moment Acheson saw the very welcome figure of Helen Phillips in the hall, going toward the door, bag in hand. Without troubling to take leave of his host, he hurried after her.

"Helen!" he said. "What's going on here?"

"Oh, my dearest Hugh!" she cried. "What indeed! I don't know. But I'm leaving."

"I'll drive you to the station."

"I've got a taxi."

"I'll get rid of it," he said, and returned presently and helped her into his car.

"Where's that woman gone, Helen?" he asked.

"I don't know and I don't want to know. I hope I'll never see another Delancey in my life."

"I want to find her, Helen. She's disposed to make trouble."

"For Elsie?"

"You know about it?"

"Quite a lot. I heard what Mrs. Delancey telephoned to Mrs. Luff last night and I also heard the prelude to that. She really was in the most unpleasant sort of rage I've ever seen."

"Then you can see that she's got to be stopped."

"I don't see how."

"Perhaps she can be frightened. I could say that if she mentions Elsie's name in connection with her little domestic troubles, there'll be suit brought against her."

"If I were you," said Miss Phillips, "I'd be cajoling, Hugh, instead of threatening. You're really quite a nice boy, when you like to be."

"If you could read my thoughts at this moment," he said,

"you'd never call me 'nice.' But how am I going to get hold of the woman?"

"I can't imagine. She simply strolled out of the house, nearly two hours ago. She didn't say good-bye to me, although she knew I was taking the 12:55, and I expected she'd be back."

"Sure she didn't take her car?"

"Oh, that's another thing! Their car was stolen last night. She reported it to the police this morning. And there was another unholy row with the chauffeur. The poor devil swears he left the door locked, but it was unlocked this morning. She discharged him on the spot, with the most libelous remarks. . . . Altogether, it's been what you'd call such a *different* kind of visit."

"She and her husband had a row last night about Elsie?"

"She really had the row alone. I thought he was remarkably patient. She said she was going to leave the house at once, but he said he'd go. I was beginning to feel dangerously sympathetic toward our Shawe until he came back and woke me up."

"Why did he do that?"

"He'd cut his hand. It was bleeding badly."

"But that needn't turn you against him."

"He was also drunk. And I imagine he's been drunk ever since."

"Did he see his wife before she left?"

"I'm quite sure she didn't even know he'd come back to the house after he left last night. After I'd tied up his hand, he went downstairs, very quietly. And I couldn't get to sleep. I had one of those appealing feminine fears that he'd set the house on fire and I went downstairs. I heard him moving around in his pathetic 'study,' and I hadn't quite the courage to ask him to be careful. So I just lay awake, and smelt smoke for hours. This morning after breakfast Josephine wanted to get in there and when she found the door locked, she was very much annoyed. She said he was always going off with the key in his pocket and that she was going to send to the village for a locksmith. That looks as if she didn't know he was there and didn't expect him back, doesn't it?"

"Yes . . ." said Hugh. "But all that doesn't help me to

find her. She didn't say anything to give you a clue, Helen?"

"Someone telephoned to her just before she went out. I didn't pay much attention but her voice does carry so . . . ! I *think* . . . I'm pretty sure I heard her say 'My poor boy!' . . ."

"Is there a boy-friend in the offing?"

"It doesn't seem probable," said Helen doubtfully. "But you never can tell. Here we are now! Au revoir, Hugh! Let me know what happens."

He stood on the platform, staring after the train.

"I've got to find her," he thought. "If she starts talking and the reporters get even a hint of it . . . No! It's too much! I'm going to find her. Perhaps she said something to one of the servants."

He went back to the Delanceys', once again rang the bell. He greeted the housemaid with a smile which he felt to be very poorly done.

"Look here!" he said. "It's very important for me to see Mrs. Delancey as soon as possible." He slipped a bill into the girl's hand. "Can you help me at all?" he asked. "Did she happen to mention to you where she was going?"

"No sir, she didn't. I'm sorry, sir. Oh, excuse me, but there's a policeman now, and Mrs. Delancey told me to take him to the garage and show him the lock and all."

A policeman, burly and solemn, was mounting the veranda steps.

"Like to see Mr. Shawe Delancey," he said.

"If it's about the garage—" the housemaid began.

"Well, it's not," said the policeman. "Just tell Mr. Delancey I'd like a word with him."

"He's asleep."

"Then he's got to get waked up," said the policeman. "I got some news for him."

The housemaid was evidently embarrassed and unhappy.

"Well, you see," she said. "Mr. Delancey's not well."

"That's too bad. But I've got to see him."

She looked at Hugh, entreatingly.

"Better take the officer to Mr. Delancey," he said. "And I'll come along."

Delancey was asleep on the couch in his study, and he

was not to be awakened by calling, by shaking him, or any other means.

"Well . . ." said the policeman, turning to Hugh. "You're a friend of Mr. Delancey's, sir? I was told to tell him personally, but . . . Maybe you'd be good enough to tell him when he's sober. I mean—when he's better, sir. There was an accident, sir. An automobile accident—and Mrs. Delancey was hurt. They took her to the hospital, and she died on the way there."

As soon as the policeman had gone, the pretty housemaid began to cry.

"Now there's nobody in the house, sir, but me and the cook. However are we going to break the news to poor Mr. Delancey?"

"Let's see . . ." said Hugh. "It's hard to say when he'll wake up. You don't know, do you, how long he's been asleep?"

"No, sir."

"Has he been like this all morning?"

"Oh, no, sir! He—" She checked herself suddenly. "I don't think so, sir."

"Why don't you?"

"I don't know, sir. I just—guessed he wasn't."

"It would help a lot if you'd tell me everything," said Hugh, gentle as a dove. But there was a curious excitement in his heart, making it beat fast. The girl was obviously confused, obviously anxious to conceal something. And Hugh was, just now, exceedingly interested in the domestic affairs of the Delanceys. Perhaps the housemaid had overheard another quarrel—about Elsie.

"I—I don't know anything to tell, sir," she said.

"You can see that this accident has changed everything," said Hugh, in a tone so serious, so reasonable, that she accepted the quite meaningless words as valid.

"Well, it couldn't do any harm now," she said, beginning to cry again. "With the madam dead and gone."

"No," Hugh agreed. "Of course not."

"I hope I'm doing right, sir, to tell you, but I saw Mr. Delancey early this morning. He was down here when I got down, sir, and he was—all right then. He said to me,

he said: 'Don't let Mrs. Delancey know I've been in the house all night. It's a little joke,' he said."

"I see . . ." said Hugh and stood staring down at Delancey with an odd look in his grey eyes. An odd look and rather a terrible one, the housemaid thought.

"I hope I've done right, sir," she began, anxiously.

"You have," said Hugh.

And that was the way he saw it. He thought it was very right that he should have heard this.

He got into his car again and drove to the Greenvale Police Station. By good luck he found the young Assistant Chief in, and willing to see him.

"I wonder if you'd mind giving me full particulars about Mrs. Delancey's death," he asked. "My name's—"

"I remember you. Up at Mrs. Luff's. I'll get the report." He rang and the report was brought to him.

"Bad smash," he said. "And it's a wonder it wasn't worse. Fellow named Paulson—radio man—was driving along the boulevard at 11:15 this morning when Mrs. Delancey drove out of that old bridlepath back of Fanning's place and ran square into him. He swears she never sounded her horn, just came out full speed, and rammed him. He was thrown clear, but his car's in splinters. And she was fatally injured; back broken, skull fractured. A taxi happened along just then and the driver sent for an ambulance. Paulson's got off with a couple of broken ribs, but Mrs. Delancey died on the way. There's one funny thing about it," he added.

"What's that?" asked Hugh.

"How Mrs. Delancey came to be driving her own car. She'd reported that car stolen this morning. We sent a man up to see the chauffeur. Fellow told a straight enough story, said he hadn't heard a sound. Said he'd locked the door but that's what he *would* say, anyhow. The lock hadn't been tampered with. He probably forgot to lock it. That's not so strange. But I'd like to know how she got that car back."

"Yes," said Hugh. "That's queer."

"Of course," the young Assistant Chief went on, "people do the damndest things. Especially women. For instance,

someone loses a valuable dog. They report the loss, and we put a man on. But before he gets a chance to start, someone'll ring up the owner. 'I can return your dog for fifty dollars and no questions asked!' 'O.K.' the owner tells him and pays the money, refuses to give a description of the fellow who brought back the pup. You can see where *that* leads. But people are always working against the police, the very same ones that are always howling about our 'inefficiency' and 'corruption.' . . . Mrs. Delancey may have made a private deal like that about her car. Looks like it, to me, her driving out of a place like that bridle-path. It would be a swell spot to hide a car."

"I suppose you've investigated it?" said Hugh.

"Why, no," the other answered. "We haven't any case now. She got her car and we're never likely to find out how."

"There'll be an inquest?"

"Oh, got to be."

"You don't have an autopsy in a case like that, do you?"

"Lord, no!" said the other a little surprised. "Only when there's any question about the manner of the death. There's none here."

"Well, look here!" said Hugh. "I've often wondered . . . Suppose someone—just an ordinary private person, y'know— isn't satisfied with the result of an inquest. Can he get an order for an autopsy?"

"He could," said the Assistant Chief looking curiously at Hugh, "if he could satisfy the police that there was any good reason for it. But a case like this . . ."

"Oh, certainly. In a case like this," Hugh agreed, and thanking the other, returned to his car. He was very hungry now. He had had no breakfast and it was long past lunch time. He stopped at a roadhouse and ate heartily.

"I told Elsie I'd be back to lunch," he thought. "I hope to Heaven she hasn't done any more fool things."

If she had, it would be his job to extricate her from her difficulties, and he was ready to do so. He was not by nature tolerant of other people or of himself. He had led a hardy life where the consequences of any transgression were swift and sure and dire. Yet for that girl he had an immense indulgence.

She was sitting on the veranda with Mrs. Luff when he drove up, and at the sight of the latter, he felt a pang of remorse. He went straight to her, before he even spoke to Elsie. He was going to tell her he was sorry for his words, but when he looked down into her face, he knew himself already forgiven.

"Hugh, you tiresome boy," she said. "When you're not coming home to lunch, you must let me know. Minnie will sulk all afternoon now because you weren't here for the braised sweetbreads."

"I got news that will keep all the Minnies in the neighborhood happy for a week," he said. And sitting down on the rail, glanced at Elsie. Her dark eyes met his, and she gave him a serious little smile that elated him unreasonably. "It's bad news," he said. "Mrs. Delancey's been unlucky."

"Oh! What's happened to her, Hugh?"

"She was killed in an automobile accident this morning."

"Hugh!" cried Mrs. Luff, rising to her feet, and resting her arm on the back of the chair. "Hugh! That frightens me!"

He went to her side, alarmed to see her so pale.

"Frightens you?" he said gently. "But—"

"Don't you *see* . . . ? We went to dinner with the Whitestones and the next morning that horrible thing happened. Last night we dined with the Delanceys and now—"

"But you don't—you can't believe in that sort—"

"I do—sometimes," she said. "And even if I don't believe in it, it frightens me. I'm going to lie down. No, thanks, Elsie dear. I'd rather be alone."

Hugh looked after her as she went into the house.

"She's the queen of women," he said.

"I know she is," said Elsie. "And I understand how she feels about this. . . . It *is* queer."

"Think so?" he said, lighting a cigarette and sitting on the rail where he could watch her face.

"Don't you? *How* did it happen?"

"I'll tell you," he said. "I'd like to hear what you've got to say about it. To begin with, Mrs. Delancey's car was stolen during the night. She reported the theft to the police about

half past eight this morning. At a quarter past eleven, she drove her car out of a by-road, full speed into another car."

He stopped and waited, almost excessively anxious to hear what she had to say.

"Was she alone?"

"Must have been. No one else could have escaped from that smash alive."

"No one saw the accident?"

"No. A taxi driver heard the crash. He got there a few moments later."

"Hugh," she said, her eyes steadily on his face. "You think there's something wrong, don't you?"

"Yes," he answered.

"What, Hugh? Suicide?"

"If she'd been going to commit suicide, she'd have run the car over a cliff or into a tree, don't you think? Instead of deliberately risking someone else's life."

"Then what?"

He did not answer and she too was quiet for a time.

"Have you seen Mr. Delancey?" she asked, presently.

The question gave him a curious thrill of pleasure. Her mind was working along the same lines that his had worked, and without the knowledge he had.

"I saw him twice this morning. He was drunk the first time. And when I left him, he'd passed out entirely."

She gave a little sigh of relief.

"Then I suppose he'd been in the house all morning," she said.

"No. He went out early in the morning. I don't know—yet—what time he returned."

"But, Hugh! In any case—she was alone in the car, driving it herself."

"I'm not sure that she was driving."

"But then—I don't see—if she wasn't driving . . ."

"I'm not sure whether she was alive then."

"I see," she said. "That's been done before, hasn't it?"

"I believe so. Anyhow, it wouldn't be too difficult."

"Then you think she was murdered?"

"That's what I think."

"By her husband."

"He's the one to profit by it."

Elsie leaned forward in her chair.

"Do the police think that, too?" she asked.

"No. There doesn't seem to be any suspicion at all."

She leaned back again.

"I'm glad of that," she said.

"Why?" he asked, surprised.

"I hope they never will suspect anything."

"You mean to say that even if you believed he—?"

"He's nice," she said. "He's really kind and nice. And she was horrible. You couldn't want to see him hunted down. . . ."

"Couldn't I?" said Hugh, grimly.

"What business is it of yours, anyhow?"

"It's any decent man's business," he said, in amazement and fast-growing indignation.

"Now you're being righteous!" she said. "If the poor wretched man did do this, it's not for you to punish him."

"You'd condone a thing like that? A murder?"

"I don't know whether you'd call it 'condoning' or not," she said slowly. "I think it's just as horrible as you do. But I think it's still more horrible to hunt down and kill a man like Mr. Delancey. I don't care what he did. He's *not* bad, or dangerous, or cruel. I know that!"

"You can't know it. I can't imagine your taking this point of view. Don't you feel any sympathy whatever for the victim? The poor woman who . . . ?"

"No," said Elsie.

"You don't care whether justice is done . . . ?"

"No."

She rose.

"If Mr. Delancey did do that," she said, "*don't you see why?*"

There was something in her voice, in her face, that shocked him.

"You mean—his wife made him unhappy?" he asked.

"No," she said, again. "Not that. If you think, you'll understand."

She walked past him, into the house, leaving him bewildered, and extremely unhappy.

CHAPTER XIV

ACHESON LOOKS INTO THINGS

HE WANTED to understand this, and, after she had gone, and he had thought it over a little, it seemed to him that he almost could. Almost. He could understand that, in her mind, Delancey must inevitably be associated with Whitestone, and that, in condemning Delancey, she condemned the crime her lover had committed.

"But there's something more than that," he thought. "To begin with, she's never tried to make excuses for Whitestone. She doesn't even pretend to think he's innocent. She's simply standing by him—to the end—as she said. From the way she spoke, she seems to think there's some special excuse or extenuation for Delancey. I don't see . . . No! I don't see. . . ."

He sighed.

"By the time I've finished," he said to himself, "she'll hate me." Yet he never for a moment considered not finishing.

"Anabel Luff said I was a 'prig,' " he thought. "And 'hard.' Well, she's probably right."

And he was going to keep on being so. "But I'll try once more," he thought. "I'll try to explain to Elsie."

He looked all over the house for her and at last knocked on the door of her bedroom. She opened the door instantly, and as he looked at her, he saw the marks of tears on her face. He remembered all she had endured and must endure in the Whitestone affair; he remembered that all this had come to her only because she had wanted to be generous.

"Elsie," he said. "Look here, Elsie . . . I don't want you to imagine I'm without any sort of feeling. But—"

"Are you going to go on hunting him?" she demanded.

"Don't you see? That sort of thing can't be left unpunished."

"You're going to do your duty—like the public hangman," she said. "Go ahead! I can't stop you!"

"Elsie . . ." he said, a little unsteadily. "Don't you think you're a bit unjust to me?"

"I don't pretend to be 'just,'" she said, with a sort

of sternness. "I need people to be kind to me instead of just. And I want to be like that to others."

"But a crime like that—"

"I don't care what Mr. Delancey did!" she cried. "You don't understand. . . . *He's* not a criminal. . . . Suppose he was driven—goaded to do *one* horrible thing. . . ." Her lip trembled, she stopped for a moment. "If I felt as you do, I couldn't *live*. I couldn't live if I was hoping—wanting Bob to be punished. What he did was hideous. Nothing could be worse. But I hope and pray to God that he gets mercy instead of justice. Good-bye."

She closed the door, and he went off, sick at heart. She had not spoken this like a wilful child. That was her creed. And it was not his. He was going on with this.

He went back to the Delanceys and again sought the pretty little housemaid. Mr. Delancey, she said, had got better and she and the cook had broken the news to him.

"He went right off to the hospital, sir," she said. "He carried on something terrible."

"That's what you'd expect, isn't it?" said Hugh, with a nice air of sympathy. "Perhaps it's a good thing he'd had something to drink."

"That's what I said to cook, sir. It's a blessing, I said, that his feelings is kind of blunted like."

"It must have taken him a long time to reach that stage," said Hugh, thoughtfully. "He must have been at it pretty well all morning."

"Oh, no, sir! He didn't come in till after half past eleven. And he was so hot and all, I felt worried. I mean, they say that those that's sort of heavy-built had ought to be careful in the hot weather. His face was just—" she paused for an adjective, "just flaming!" she said, with satisfaction. "You'd have thought he'd been running."

"Maybe he had," said Hugh, with a smile.

"No, sir. He came in Mrs. Dale's car. She drove him right up to the door."

"Is that the Mrs. Dale who lives on Oak Avenue?"

"No, sir. This Mrs. Dale lives right up the road. A white house with a tower like."

"I see. . . . Tell Mr. Delancey I stopped in, will you?"

"I hope you'll come back, sir," said the girl, earnestly. "It's just dreadful, to think of his sitting here alone in the evening. He's—" She stopped, with a sob. "Cook and I both say—he's the nicest gentleman we ever worked for."

As he went away, Hugh thought over that. He wondered what that girl and the cook would say if his suspicions were confirmed. Would they feel as he did, or would they be like Elsie?

Then he thought, sombrely, of Josephine Delancey whom he had seen only a few hours ago, in her modish black gown, with her rouge, her powder, her uneasy affectations. If he were to feel pity, let it be for her, who had had to die and was unregretted.

He went to Mrs. Dale's house, and was fortunate enough to find that lady at home. He had a pretext all ready.

"Sorry to trouble you . . ." he said. "My name's Acheson. I'm visiting the Luffs just now. . . . I'd like to ask if you saw a black Alsatian dog anywhere in the neighborhood this morning."

This worked better than he had expected, and even a little better than was necessary. Mrs. Dale was, he discovered, inordinately fond of dogs, and the question excited her.

"I can't *remember* seeing one," she said. "And I'm sure I *should* remember. They're such magnificent animals. Have you lost your dog, Mr. Acheson?"

"A friend of mine . . ." he said. "I'm making enquiries. . . . Someone thought he'd seen the dog between here and Delancey's place. I don't like to ask Delancey in the circumstances—"

She wanted to know what circumstances, and she listened to him with shocked dismay.

"Imagine!" she cried. "And I drove him up from the station. . . . And neither of us had the *least* premonition of such a thing!"

After a suitable exchange of comments upon the tragedy, Hugh prepared to take his leave.

"I can't ask Delancey about the Alsatian . . ." he said. "But if you hear—"

"Poor Mr. Delancey couldn't have seen it without *my* seeing it too, Mr. Acheson."

"But perhaps before you picked him up."

"Oh, but I met him at the station! He'd just come out, from the city. He said the heat was simply too much for him, and he did look frightfully flushed. . . . Mr. Acheson, why don't you offer a reward for the dog? It's so horrible to think of a beautiful animal like that in the hands of goodness knows what sort of people."

It was difficult to get away from her, so great was her interest in the black Alsatian.

"I do hope you'll find him," she said, as he was leaving. "So shocking about Mrs. Delancey, isn't it? I can't say she was a particular friend of mine, but I do like *Mr. Delancey*."

Not yet had Hugh heard one word of regret for Josephine Delancey. And the more she was thus neglected and disdained, the stronger grew his determination to see that justice was done her. If he were her sole champion, very well. She should not lie forever unavenged.

He was more and more certain now. He believed that he could piece together what had happened. When Delancey had first told him his wife had "disappeared," a faint uneasiness had stirred in Hugh, and when the housemaid had told her story, he had had a strange glimpse of the truth. He had, as always, trusted in his own instinct, his own vision, and he had, as always, set about verifying it. The Assistant Chief had confirmed his own idea, even Elsie had had the same suspicion. But that wasn't enough. He intended to check his theory, point by point.

As he drove away from Mrs. Dale's, he made a reconstruction of the crime, for his own guidance. He knew that Delancey had left his house early in the morning. He knew that Josephine had left later, after a telephone call. Helen Phillips had heard her say, "My poor boy," and Hugh thought she had said that to her husband, the man who was summoning her to her death. The car had been stolen from the garage by someone who had a key. Josephine had somewhere, somehow, met with the man who had stolen the car. She had gone, and at 11:15 she had died. At 11:30

or so Mrs. Dale had picked up Delancey at the railway station. He could have got there in fifteen minutes from the bridle-path if he had run. And Mrs. Dale had described him as "frightfully flushed." The housemaid, too, had spoken of that. He could have reached the station as the train from New York was pulling in, and without much difficulty have mixed with the arriving passengers. Then he had gone home and begun to drink. He might well drink, with that meeting in his mind.

"He killed her," thought Hugh. "He put her in the car, and started it, straight ahead. I don't know yet how he killed her or how he got the car. But I will know before long."

He drove to the Greenvale hospital and asked if he might see Paulson, the radio man who had been luckier than Josephine. The matron made no objection to that, and, though he knew and understood a good many things, Hugh did not suspect the reason for that. He didn't know how greatly his investigation was simplified by the mere fact that he was Hugh Acheson, a personable young man with very nice manners and a very rich father. He didn't realize and never in his life would realize that other people's requests were not granted so readily. He went into the men's ward, and there was Paulson, in considerable pain, drawn and grey with the shock of his encounter with death but willing, nervously eager to talk.

"I told my wife—my wife just left—I told her—'What did I always say about women drivers?' My wife, she's been wanting to learn to drive our car, but I always said no. I always said women are too blame nervous. I'm not saying they haven't got *brains*. There's women as smart as any man. Only they haven't got the nerves."

He couldn't stop. He was aware of his repetition, his pointless stream of words, and he couldn't stop. Hugh saw that.

"Anything I can do for you?" he asked.

"Well, no, thanks." Paulson answered. "I carried some insurance on my car. . . . I can get another one, after a while. . . . Only thing is, my business is a kind of one-man business. . . . I'm the only one who understands what my

customers want, and the arrangements I got with them. In a business like mine, you don't have all your arrangements about installments and all written down—"

There were tears in his eyes, tears of pain and desperate worry.

"I don't want to sue Mr. Delancey," he said. "He's a fine man. Always got a pleasant word. . . . But it was his wife's fault. All her fault. . . . My God! I'll never forget. . . . I . . . I . . . I . . ." He had to stop for a moment. "She came driving right square into me. . . . I saw her coming. . . . I knew what was going to happen. . . . You wouldn't believe the things that come into your head just in a moment. . . . She drove right square into me. . . . If she'd of hit nearer the front of my car, my wife'd be a widow now."

He tried to laugh.

"Mr. Delancey's too much upset to look after things now . . ." said Hugh. "But I think I can manage something . . . I've seen him this morning." He could not bring himself to say that he was a friend of Delancey's, but he let it be implied. "If I can help you to tide over . . . I'll see to all your hospital expenses, and perhaps—"

Paulson's gratitude made him ashamed and exceedingly uncomfortable. It was so little to do for a fellow-creature.

"There's one good thing," he said. "It must have been over very quickly for Mrs. Delancey."

Paulson was silent for a moment.

"Y-yes," he said with a stammer, "I guess so. The taxi came along right away. The driver even heard the smash. And we were both of us unconscious then. She never came out of it. . . . But just before. . . . I guess she—she knew what was coming. . . . She—was staring."

Hugh changed the subject hastily, and when he left, Paulson was still in pain, but no longer tormented by anxiety about his wife and his business.

"She was staring . . ." thought Hugh.

Staring, because she was aghast at what was happening, or because she saw nothing . . . ? If she had been dead, would Paulson have known?

If it had been so, if Delancey had sent that car forward into a main road, he was doubly a criminal. Paulson, the

poor young devil with his wife, his "one-man business," might so easily have died too. There could be no mercy for that; there must be no halt now in the search for the truth.

His next step was to return to the Greenvale Police Station. The young Assistant Chief was occupied, but the policeman at the desk was civil in answering his questions.

"I heard that Mrs. Delancey's chauffeur got into a little trouble this morning," he said.

"She changed her mind," said the other. "First she told me she knew he'd had a hand in the theft of the car. But when I asked her if she wanted to make a charge against him, she backed down. He was sore, though."

"Decent fellow," said Hugh. "I might be able to get a job for him if I knew where he was."

"Well, he's right down at the Station Hotel. And jobs aren't so plenty, just now. I guess he'd be glad. . . ."

Hugh found Linney in the dismal little lounge of the hotel, talking with vehemence to another man. At the mention of a possible job, he was interested.

"I haven't saved like I ought," he said. "I couldn't hold out more than a couple weeks. Only, I never had no idea of losing that job. I was glad to work for Mr. Delancey. He was a prince. Even now, if he'd take me back, I'd work for him for less money than maybe someone else would give me. But *her*—! Gawd! If I'd of had money, I'd of seen a lawyer this morning. I'd of sued her, the things she said to me."

"She's dead," said Hugh, curtly.

"I know it, sir," said Linney, unabashed. "But that don't make it right, what she said to me. Telling me I must of lent my key to a friend of mine. Kept on, too, even when I brung my key out of my pocket. Then, 'Well, there's only two keys,' she says. 'Yours and Mr. Delancey's,' she kep' saying, 'and that door was opened with a key. Unless you left it open. On purpose!' And fires me on the spot. All right. She gets killed, driving that very same car. Looks like it was a judgment on her."

"That's no way to talk," said Hugh.

"No, sir. But if you could of heard the things she said to me this morning. Always nagging everyone, she was, and Mr.

Delancey always as polite and nice to her as if she was the Queen of Sheba. Like she thought she was."

It seemed to Hugh as if an evil spirit pursued him, forcing him perpetually to hear the unhappy woman maligned. Murdered, and unmourned, unregretted. . . . As if a rain of blows fell upon her unprotected head.

It was growing late now, and he was tired, more tired than the most vigorous physical exercise would have made him. As he drove home in the dusk, he thought about Elsie. He was sorry, very sorry, that there must be between them an unending struggle. He pitied her, yet he could not pity her enough, in all her suffering, to turn from his course. It was bad enough for her now, and in a little while it would be worse. When Whitestone was tried for his life, she would have to endure with him every hour of that appalling torment. To the end, she had said, and she meant it. And Hugh was fairly certain what the end would be. Even Vesey had almost no hope.

"There aren't really any mitigating circumstances from a jury's point of view," he had said. "Mrs. Whitestone was a virtuous woman—good housekeeper—her neighbours liked her. He didn't kill her in a sudden rage. . . . It's going to be almost impossible to prove temporary insanity. And absolutely impossible to produce any other motive than sheer hate. The fact that he was infatuated with Miss Sackett won't help him."

"It needn't come out at all."

"It's out already," Vesey had answered. "And she's so young and good-looking. She'll appear as a sort of victim, that's all. Whitestone himself doesn't make any excuses. He simply says he wants to get the whole thing over as fast as possible. . . ."

When it was over for Whitestone, it wouldn't be over for Elsie. She was very young; she would have plenty of time for remembering all this. . . . It was horrible for her, yet pity was not Hugh's chief emotion in thinking of her.

"I don't know . . ." he said to himself. "Perhaps it's better to suffer as she does, and will, than not to care much."

Yes. . . . One could almost envy the people like Elsie, no matter what happened to them. She had said he didn't

"understand" and perhaps that was true. . . .

He was almost late to dinner. He dressed in a hurry and ran down the stairs to the lounge, where Luff was shaking cocktails. And he was met by a curious silence. Elsie was not there. Mrs. Luff lay back in a chair, quite without her casual good-humour. Luff went on shaking and shaking.

"Elsie's gone to bed with a bad headache," Mrs. Luff observed, presently.

Hugh was not pleased by her tone, in which he detected a note of reproval.

"So I'm a brute," he thought. "Very well!"

Luff was never talkative, but to-night his taciturnity was accentuated by his wife's unusual silence. And Hugh made up his mind that if she chose to maintain this very unjust attitude of reproachfulness, he would make no effort. It was not an agreeable meal. Once in a while, with an effort, Mr. Luff made some polite remark to which Hugh returned an equally polite reply, and in between their words, were those blank, fatigued silences.

It was hard for Hugh.

"It's not exactly a pleasure to me, to see this through," he thought, with something as near to bitterness as his equable nature permitted. "I don't enjoy hunting down the poor devil. I'm sorry for him. . . . But it's morbid—it's dangerous—to keep all your pity for the people who break the laws, and have none for the victims. There's no one who gets through life without any temptations. Most people are able to resist them, and they're the ones to be considered, not the others. Perhaps Delancey had 'extreme provocation.' . . . Like Whitestone. There's certainly a fundamental weakness in Delancey and perhaps he can't help that. But the fact remains that he's not to be trusted. He's broken down once, under provocation. No matter what remorse he feels, that same weakness will always be there. And if there's another provocation . . ."

For a moment he wished he might have a chance to say all this to Elsie, but with a sigh he renounced the hope. It would do no good. Justice meant nothing to her. And, indeed, most of the people he had met seemed heartlessly indifferent to Josephine's death. He would have to go on alone, and if

he were successful, no one would be pleased.

In his own mind he was sure now, but he did not consider his evidence anything like sufficient to present to the police. To-morrow he meant to analyze Delancey's movements, to dissect his actions. He wanted evidence that the telephone call which had summoned Josephine to her death had come from Delancey; he wanted to prove that Delancey had taken the car from the garage. That, he thought, would be enough to induce the police to order an autopsy.

He was not certain, however, whether an autopsy could prove that Josephine had been dead *before* the accident. He knew very little about such matters, only what he had read in an occasional detective story. He saw that his case was weak, would still be weak even if he got his evidence, because he could not adduce what to him was the all-important fact, the fact of Delancey's fatal and dangerous weakness. He knew this, but other people wouldn't believe it. They would see Delancey, big, burly and ruddy; they would take into consideration his good-humour, his popularity; his air of assurance would be accepted as valid, and everyone would say he was not the sort of man to do this atrocious thing.

"And in a way he isn't," thought Hugh. "He's weak, but it's the sort of weakness that would make him conform to all the laws and regulations, not rebel against them. Elsie was right, when she said he wasn't 'bad.' He'd never have done a thing like—this, without some tremendous provocation."

He tried, with intense concentration, to imagine what the provocation could have been. Not love. Delancey wasn't the man to commit a crime of passion. Money . . . ? It was possible if he were driven to desperation by lack of money. But how could it be so? His wife was undoubtedly infatuated with him; she would not have let him want, and he must have known that.

"No . . ." he thought. "No. I don't see . . ."

Then he remembered again, what Elsie had said.

"If Mr. Delancey did do that, *don't you see why?*"

No. He didn't see, he couldn't see why. But he was beginning to see. . . . Elsie had given him the clue. She knew.

She knew, because she loved Whitestone; because she understood Whitestone. . . .

"That's it!" he cried to himself. "That's what she meant! It was Whitestone who made Delancey do it. Whitestone put the idea into his head. Delancey may not even know that. Suggestible people often don't realize where the suggestions come from that they act on. Whitestone was his great friend. Whitestone must have talked to him *about his* wife. . . ."

He remembered many things now. When they had gone to Whitestone, to tell him of Rosalind's death. . . . Delancey had been frightened when they had found the cottage empty. Frightened, because he suspected the truth—or because he knew the truth.

At that dinner party, the last dinner Rosalind Whitestone was ever to eat, Delancey had been frightened. There had been that discussion in the pantry. "Oh, shut up about your plan!"

"Delancey knew even then," thought Hugh. "Whitestone must have told him. . . ."

It was incredible to imagine Delancey listening to such a plan, and taking no steps to prevent it. Unless he had been entirely under Whitestone's influence. Or unless he hadn't believed in it.

Then a new idea came to Hugh, suddenly. Whitestone had confessed. . . . What if Delancey could be brought to confess? It wouldn't be difficult. . . .

"No!" he thought, rebelling. "That's not my job."

Not his job to trap that wretched man into a confession.

He rose as Mrs. Luff got up, and they went into the drawing-room, but Luff did not follow them.

"Hugh!" said Mrs. Luff. "What did you say to Elsie?"

He considered this a most unfair question which he did not intend to answer.

"Sorry . . ." he said.

"Hugh," she went on, "if you've said anything to make matters worse for Elsie, it was—cruel."

"It's not my intention to be 'cruel' to anyone," he answered briefly.

"But you see, Hugh, you're so hardy," she said. "You

don't know how other people feel. Even I— This whole thing . . .” He was almost tempted by the break in her voice. “I'm not directly concerned. I didn't really care much for either Mrs. Whitestone or Mrs. Delancey. . . . And yet . . . I can't sleep. . . .”

He seized her hand, dismayed by the sight of tears in her eyes.

“Imagine what it means to Elsie!” she cried.

In a moment she recovered herself.

“I know you're not cruel,” she said. “We won't talk any more about it. But there's one thing that's quite a relief. . . . One thing that seems—human and not distressing. Helen Phillips telephoned me. She'd heard about the accident and she wanted to know who was staying with poor Mr. Delancey. And when I told her nobody was, she said *she'd* come back.”

“She can't do that,” said Hugh, curtly.

“She'll bring someone with her, of course. She's got some sort of old aunt, you know, quite a nice old lady, but perfectly destitute.”

“She can't go there!” Hugh repeated.

“I can't see why not. She told me she was so very sorry for the poor man, and he's absolutely alone. And she *likes* him. It really might not be such a bad thing . . .” said Mrs. Luff with a thoughtful look in her eyes. “He may not be exactly her sort of person, but after all . . .”

Hugh saw very well what that expression of hers meant. She was contemplating the possibility of a match between Helen Phillips, the penniless and respectable adventuress, and Shawe Delancey. . . .

It seemed to him for a moment as if everyone on earth were leagued against him to defend and comfort Shawe Delancey. Everyone was sorry for Delancey. . . .

“One thing's certain,” he thought. “Helen can't go there.”

Helen, like himself, was what Mrs. Luff called “hardy,” but even she would be badly upset to find herself a guest in that house, if Hugh succeeded in what he intended to do. He had known Helen a long time. He liked her. He had no intention of letting her become involved in the coming disaster.

His first idea was to telephone to her, and warn her not to come. But he decided that that would be useless. She could insist upon his explaining, she would be tiresome about it, she would talk about "poor Shawe Delancey." He felt very little confidence in women this evening.

"And suppose I'm wrong?" he thought.

He had always admitted that possibility, but now it occurred to him that perhaps the very opposition he had met with was making him over-confident, over-anxious, to prove his case. When the housemaid's words had first aroused suspicion in him, he had tried to check every surmise, he had sincerely desired to be open-minded and fair. But perhaps he had not been. Perhaps he had been grossly mistaken in his estimate of Delancey's character, and upon that estimate rested his entire case. Perhaps he had been a callous and cock-sure fool.

He felt like one. He was, apparently, the only living creature capable of suspecting Delancey.

"I'll have to see him again," he thought. "And it had better be to-night, too, before Helen has a chance to come."

It seemed to him a matter of vital necessity that he should confront Delancey again, before he went on with his investigation. He must make sure that Delancey really was as he believed him to be. This doubt was entirely new to him, and it was not quite genuine, his faith in his own observation could not vanish so easily. It was not much more than a faint uneasiness. Yet if everyone were against him, he must not be arrogant.

"Elsie agrees with me, though," he thought. "She thinks he could have done that. She thinks he did do that."

He wished to see Delancey at once, and talk to him without prejudice. He sought in his mind for a pretext, and one was most providentially supplied to him. In his pocket he discovered Delancey's cigarette-case, which he had left here the afternoon before Rosalind's death, and which Hugh had never remembered to restore to him. That would do, if Delancey showed any surprise at his visit; probably, however, he would not. Probably it would seem to Delancey no more than ordinary kindness.

"I think I'll take a walk," he observed.

"Don't be late," said Mrs. Luff, mechanically. It was what she always said to the young people who visited her.

He set out in the cool, breezy night, and he tried his utmost to banish all preconceived ideas from his mind.

"If I knew only these facts," he thought, "and the man in the case was a fellow like Luff, for instance, would I think they were serious?"

Hypothetical cases did not appeal to him. He couldn't consider a man like Luff in this situation. It was Delancey who was involved, and he had, whether he wanted to or not, formed a definite opinion of Delancey. A decent sort of fellow, genuinely kind and amiable, but with a fatal flaw in his soul, a fellow who could be stampeded into an action he would eternally regret. He would do what was suggested to him, and he would justify himself.

"Whitestone . . ." thought Hugh, and had a mental image of the haggard, violent Whitestone whispering to his friend that horrible suggestion. . . . He banished this image, as too fantastic to suit him. He meant to meet Delancey as if he had never seen him before. He wanted to look at him dispassionately, soberly, in absolute honesty. He had never before made a mistake in his judgment of men, but he was, like all mortals, very liable to error. And it was likely that his troubled concern for Elsie, his uneasiness over the Whitestone affair, had clouded his naturally clear insight. He would see Delancey, this one more time, and he would trust utterly to that thing inside himself, compounded of observation and experience and instinct, that had not yet betrayed him.

It was a matter of extreme importance to him. He walked slowly, trying not to think of anything, trying above all not to think of Elsie. . . . The wind blew the dust in eddies along the road. The clouds were travelling fast to-night, in black and ragged wisps.

"It's going to rain," he thought.

Delancey's house was brilliantly lighted, from top to bottom.

"Suppose the fellow's been drinking again?" he thought. Then it would be still simpler to weigh him, the barriers would be down. He rang the bell and waited a long time,

rang again and heard two people coming along the hall. The housemaid opened the door, and behind her stood an older woman.

"Oh, it's you, sir!" she cried, in obvious relief. "I'm so glad . . . Mr. Delancey's here, all by himself . . . And it's so kind of queer in the house. . . . I didn't like to come to the door alone."

She regarded Hugh as an old friend of the family now. She was respectful to him, but none the less was she aware that he was young and a man, and she was young and a pretty girl.

"I'll tell Mr. Delancey, sir," she said.

She was back again promptly. "He's in the study, sir," she said. "Will you please step this way?"

Hugh followed her down the hall. Last night Josephine Delancey had walked here, and never would again. . . . He mustn't think of her, either. He must simply look at Delancey and make up his mind whether he was persecuting an innocent man, or seeking justice. . . .

Delancey was sitting at his enormous writing-table. He did not rise as Hugh entered and he did not smile.

"He looks damned ill," was Hugh's first impression.

But an innocent man could look ill as well as a guilty one.

"Sit down, won't you, Acheson?" he said. "Very kind of you to drop in. I . . . Very kind . . . I . . ."

He was sober now. His eyes were clear, the flush had gone from his face, leaving it pale. But his voice was unsteady and his hand, fidgeting with a box cover on the desk, was trembling.

"I . . . They've been asking me . . ." he said. "I mean if I . . . if I . . . want her . . . brought back here. . . . She's at the funeral parlour now. . . . I don't—I mean to say—when—when a person's gone . . . Can't matter to *them*. . . . I mean—how do you feel about it?"

"It's more or less a matter of sentiment," said Hugh.

He must not stare at this shaken and wretched man. But he must observe, every gesture, every word. He must make up his mind whether this was a weak man's dread of death in any form, or the horrible shrinking of a guilty man from the presence of his victim.

"I can't decide . . ." Delancey went on. "I—went over to the hospital . . . I—I *saw* her . . ."

He was dangerously close to breaking down. If he did break down, he would almost inevitably betray himself, but that was further than Hugh was prepared to go. Guilty or innocent, Delancey was a man, and whether or not he deserved punishment, he did not, in Hugh's eyes, deserve humiliation.

"Better not talk about it just now," he suggested. "Won't you try a cigarette?" He reached for his case. "And by the way," he said, bringing out the other case. "This is yours, isn't it?"

A horrible thing happened. As if his casual words had been some unholy spell, Delancey's face changed before his eyes, grew grey with a ghastly pallor, even to his lips. He stared across the table at Acheson, stared and stared.

Then his trembling hand flung aside the box cover on the table and seized what had been lying beneath it. And Acheson found himself looking into the barrel of a revolver.

CHAPTER XV

THE DEATH WISH

THE hand that held the revolver was wavering, but that made little difference, at such close range it was almost impossible to miss a target entirely.

And if his hand were shaking, Delancey's gaze was steady enough. His dilated blue eyes were fixed upon Hugh with a sort of glare.

In that moment of extreme danger, Hugh felt no fear, nothing but a tension within him as if every nerve, every muscle had made itself ready for what was to come. There would be a shattering report, and then that tension would be violently released like a tightly-coiled spring, and all that made Hugh Acheson would fly into pieces.

"Now you—you get out of here!" said Delancey.

It took a long moment for the taut nerves to convey that message to Hugh's brain. It was as if a soldier waiting for

the signal to go over the top heard instead the order to dismiss.

"Get out of here!" Delancey shouted.

Hugh rose to his feet, and, with a little click, his brain began working again. He had no doubt about Delancey's guilt now, no doubt about the look in his eyes. He was utterly desperate, like a cornered wild beast. He wanted only to escape, and the realization of that roused in Hugh the immemorially ancient lust of the chase. The dangerous quarry should not escape. If he could not, at the moment, overpower Delancey by force, he could outwit him.

He took up his hat, and then, with an extraordinarily quick movement, dashed the electric lamp off the desk and crouched down in the dark. A shot should have followed at once; the silence was atrocious. He waited and waited, in the dark, longing for the shot to ring out. . . . Only darkness and silence. Was Delancey able to move toward him so noiselessly . . . ?

Then he heard a long, long sigh.

"Acheson?" came Delancey's voice, almost in a whisper. "Have you gone away?"

Hugh did not think it expedient to answer. He stayed where he was, very quiet, crouched down, ready to spring. He heard footsteps now, but moving away from him, and away from the door.

"The window . . . ?" thought Hugh.

A light sprang up; Delancey had turned on an electric candle in a wall bracket. He looked about him, but he did not at once see Hugh. He moved forward, and Hugh sprang at him with a flying tackle, and brought him to the ground with a crash.

He lay still, but his eyes were open. The automatic lay on the floor. Hugh picked it up, and always with a wary eye upon the other, he pulled loose from its hook the silk rope that tied back the heavy curtain.

"Sit up!" he said to Delancey, and Delancey obeyed. He was docile and unresisting while Hugh tied his wrists behind his back, then with Hugh's hand under his elbow to assist him, he struggled to his feet and sat down behind the desk again.

"You've given yourself away, Delancey," said Hugh.

"I know," said Delancey, and began to tremble violently, his teeth chattering. "Oh, my God!" he cried. "*Why* didn't you let me do it? I could have done it . . . then. If you hadn't come . . . Why didn't you let me blow my brains out? I tell you, I could have done it. . . . But when you smashed out the light . . . When it got dark . . . I—I can't stand the dark . . . I'll never have the nerve to do it now. . . . Why didn't you let me?"

He had broken down now, hopelessly. He had no defences now. Hugh would see now what he had determined to see, the very soul of this man. And he regretted it; he wished to Heaven that he had not come. This man before him was in torment, and must endure more and more torment. He wished that he had left him to escape, by the only road left open to him.

"You were going to shoot yourself?" he asked.

"Like Robert . . ." said Delancey, with a sob.

"Whitestone! You mean—?"

"I did *that* for him, anyway. For—both of them. . . ."

"What do you mean, Delancey?"

Delancey straightened himself in his chair.

"She asked me to," he said. "Elsie, you know. She said that if I pulled wires, I could get to see him. I'm pretty well known in this town—and I did. I was allowed to see him and I smuggled a gun to him. He thanked me . . . He . . . It was the only thing left to do for him. . . . He shot himself—just before you came. . . . He's got out of it. . . . They'll find out that I gave him the gun, but I don't care. I—I *didn't* care—because I thought . . . O God!"

His voice broke, he slumped in the chair.

"O God!" he cried. "It would have been so much easier than going to the chair. . . . Only now . . . All that will take so long . . . If you'd only let me alone—it would all have been over now . . . It's going to take so long. . . ."

Justice was triumphant. All Hugh had to do was to telephone to the police; they would take away this bound man, and he would never be free again. But it would be a long time, as he said, before it was all over.

"Do you want a spot of whiskey?" asked Hugh.

Because it was unbearable to see this fellow-creature utterly without hope, without even the will to hope.

"No," Delancey answered. "That's done. I made up my mind—after I'd seen Robert—for the last time—that when I went, I'd go sober. The way *he* did. He wasn't afraid. All he cared about was getting it over quick. He wasn't even sorry about Rosalind. I wished he had been a little. Rosalind was—Rosalind was . . ." He had to stop for a moment. "All right," he said. "If it's got to be—this way—the long way. . . . If the p-police are coming, I'll go with them sober."

There was something in Delancey after all, that was not broken. He was still shaking, he was white about the mouth and nostrils, but there was something . . . Hugh had the strange idea that that big, sturdy body was going to pieces, and that only a shining spark of spirit kept the man together and whole.

"If you thought I—I was threatening you—with that gun . . ." Delancey went on, "you were wrong. I just wanted you to get out—and give me a chance . . . I . . . I . . . Hurry up, for God's sake! Send for the police! I can't stand . . . I can't stand . . ." He made an effort to control himself. "Let's get it over with," he said.

"I'm sorry," said Hugh, and he was. The excitement of the chase had vanished, there was only pain in the sight of the quarry brought down, trussed, to be taken to the ordeal. With all his heart he regretted that he had come too soon. He wished he might have found Delancey dead, and he was glad Whitestone was dead.

"You needn't be sorry," said Delancey. "You couldn't help it. It's fate. It had to be you. Like it was with—Robert. It's *just* the same! It's just what happened to Robert!"

"I don't quite . . ."

"Don't you see? You found Robert's eye-glasses down on the beach. That was what did for him. And now you've found my cigarette case the same way. I'd forgotten that case. I missed it a while ago, and I felt pretty sure it was in the pocket of my grey suit. But when I put on my grey suit yesterday, I never thought of looking in the pockets for it. I forgot it. And it's fate for everyone to forget just

one thing, like that. Of course, it must have dropped out of my pocket, on the bridle-path, and you found it there."

It seemed to Hugh now as if he had won his victory by a contemptible trick. He had not meant it to be so, he had produced the cigarette case without a suspicion of the result that would ensue. Now he wished it had not happened.

"It's fate," Delancey repeated, a look of dim sorrow in his blue eyes. "All right. Whatever I get is coming to me. . . . It's just like it was with Robert. I'll confess, like he did. I'll tell you exactly how it was."

"You needn't confess to me!" said Hugh, in haste. "I'm not your judge, Delancey."

"You're the one who was sent," said Delancey. "You're the one who found the case. You're the one that stopped me from blowing out my brains. I dreamt about you last night. Fate. . . ."

His voice trailed off, he sat there, hands tied behind him, not trembling any longer, but intolerably resigned. "I think I knew—all the time—that I'd have to pay. . . . You don't know what it's like—paying for a thing like that. . . . Robert felt like that. He wasn't sorry, but he said he knew you always had to pay—for doing things like that. He knew what I was going to do, too. He never knew it *had* happened and I didn't tell him, but he knew before. He said I'd do it. . . . I forgot the day. . . . The day before Rosalind—went . . . He told me then. He said—I felt the—death wish."

"Whitestone told you you were going to—?" said Hugh. And he wondered if that could be used in Delancey's defence, that his friend whom he had so loved and admired, had suggested this horrible thing to him.

"Robert said I had the wish—the death wish. And when you've got that, the rest doesn't count. . . . The rest came—without any trouble. I thought out the whole plan while I was smoking one cigarette. . . . I'd like a cigarette now, Acheson. You could untie my hands. You've got the gun."

Hugh dropped the automatic into his pocket. He wished he had never come here, never suspected this crime. But he had suspected, and he had come, and now he had to see it through. Delancey would never again summon the cour-

age to shoot himself, and he could not be allowed to go free, after what he had done. Josephine was dead, and unlamented. It was her right that she should at least be avenged.

"I'll ring up the police now," he said, with a sort of gentleness.

"Wait a minute!" said Delancey. "If I tell you and you write it down, maybe they'll let me alone—until tomorrow morning. Because I'm—*tired*. I want a good night's sleep."

A strange and dreadful thing to want.

"I'm sorry," said Hugh, "but I'm afraid you'll have to make your statement to them."

"Even if I say I plead guilty?"

"Even then."

"I'll have to answer their questions?"

"Afraid so."

"It's all straight in my mind," said Delancey, with a sigh. "Haven't forgotten a single thing. I mean to say, they can't get me all mixed up, like they did before. . . . I thought it all out while I was smoking a cigarette . . . Last cigarette I had in my pocket . . . I did it all just as I'd planned it. First, I got the car out of the garage. Shoved it out and down the hill before I started the engine. Then—"

"Look here, Delancey! You mustn't do this . . . You mustn't talk—until you've seen a lawyer."

"I'll have to talk to the police," said Delancey. "They know how to make you answer questions. Anyhow, I don't care now, Acheson. It's a sort of relief . . . I mean to say, I feel as if I'd been—shut away from everyone—ever since it happened. . . . I'd rather tell you first. I think you—sort of understand things."

His lack of any rancour, any resentment, was a pitiable thing, a touching thing. And a dreadful thing, for this man who had cornered him.

"I drove the car to the bridle-path," he went on. "I hid it in the woods there. Hardly anyone ever goes there. Then I came back here, and I cut my hand with a pen-knife. I wanted Helen Phillips to know I was in the house, so I asked her to tie it up for me. I'm sorry I did that now. She was—nice to me . . . She didn't know—what was in my mind . . . I'm sorry I'm never going to see her again. . . ."

He stopped for a time, inhaling his cigarette, and again there was sorrow in his eyes, as if he could envisage in a moment all the delights of life that were lost to him.

"I spoke to Annie in the morning, too. I wanted it known that I was in the house. I thought that would keep people from suspecting I had anything to do with the car. I did it all, just the way I'd planned. I went to my office early in the morning, and I telephoned to Josephine. That's the meanest part of the whole thing—the lie I made up to tell her . . . The devil himself couldn't have thought of a dirtier trick. . . . I told her I'd got in trouble—told her a friend had given me some money to buy certain bonds with, and I'd invested it in something else and lost it. I asked her to meet me on the bridge-path, and I'd tell her how to help me out of the jam. I was going to appeal to her pride, you know. But—she was—just sorry for me . . . She called me 'poor boy' . . . That's going to stay in my mind till I die. Maybe after I'm dead."

His voice grew unsteady again. He picked up the silver cigarette case and opened it, took out a cigarette and tapped it on the desk, went on tapping and tapping.

"That made me realize . . . That was when I began to—to pay. I felt—I can't tell you how I felt. But I had to go on with it. You can see that. I tried to think of a way out, and I couldn't. If I told her I'd got out of the trouble by myself, she'd have made me answer a lot of questions. About whose money I'd taken and what stock I'd bought and so on. . . . And—you don't know what it's like to be asked a lot of questions you don't want to answer. That's what the police did with me—about Robert. I couldn't tell her the truth, either. Couldn't tell her—the idea I'd had—no matter if I was sorry . . . You—you can see that I couldn't live with her again—ever—after that idea—that wish had come into my head. No. I had to go on with it. Had to meet her there. And when I saw her, coming down the path . . . Oh, my God! . . . I know a lot of people didn't like Josephine . . . But she had—she had—so many good qualities."

Hugh turned away his head, so that he need not see Delancey. It was incredible. Even after he had "realized," Delancey had gone on, he had seen that woman, defenceless

in her utter lack of suspicion, walking along the path toward him, coming to help him, and still he had gone on with it.

"She was—I never saw her so—kind . . ." Delancey went on. "Oh God! When I think of it . . . She was just sorry for me . . . Didn't blame me . . . She was really fond of me."

Still Hugh said nothing and still he could not endure to look at Delancey. He felt no pity for the man now, nothing but an icy contempt. Delancey was beyond measure baser than Whitestone had been. Whitestone had killed his wife because he hated her and loved Elsie, but Delancey had felt no hatred, no passion of any sort. He had killed, had committed a murder, because he could think of no easier way out of a complication.

"She wrote a cheque for me," Delancey went on. "I've got it in my pocket now. To help me out. She believed the lie I told her. I said I'd have to go away—leave the country for a while . . . She cried . . . I pretended I'd write, and she could join me later . . . She kissed me . . . Then—"

"I— You needn't tell me any more," said Hugh.

He felt indeed that he could not listen to any more of this. He felt that there could be no forgiveness on earth or in Heaven for this man.

But Delancey still talked.

"She got into the car and drove away. I watched her go. I knew I'd never see her again."

"*What!*" cried Hugh.

"I couldn't live with her again, after I'd had that idea. I watched her go. I saw the whole thing. *All of it.* She must have stepped on the accelerator by mistake. She was always doing that. She was the worst driver—"

"What are you saying?"

"I'm telling you how it was!" Delancey answered. "I saw the whole thing. I saw her drive square into the other car. . . . I knew she was killed, but I was afraid to go and see. I ran to the station."

"Delancey! Look here, man! You—gave me to understand that—you'd killed her."

"I did," said Delancey.

The idea came to Hugh that the man was mad.

"But if she was killed in the accident . . . ?"

"She was. But I killed her. If I hadn't wished her dead, it wouldn't have happened. Don't you *see*? It was—the *death wish* that brought her to that place—that killed her. I take all the responsibility."

CHAPTER XVI

ELSIE

HUGH sat immobile staring before him. He knew the bridle-path well enough. He had visited it only today. In his mind he could see it now, a lane bordered with trees, green and quiet. He thought of Delancey waiting there, sick with horror and dismay, Delancey who was capable of the wish to kill but not of the deed. God only knew how many other men went about the world harboring such wishes and were not ashamed! Yet Delancey thought he must pay for his intention with his life.

"*Please, Acheson!*" he cried, with a sort of despairing impatience. "Call up the police, and let's get this over."

"No . . ." said Hugh, rousing himself with a start. "I'm afraid you'll get into trouble over the gun you smuggled in to Whitestone—"

"Oh, that?" said Delancey, with a faint frown of weariness. "Elsie's arranged that. Whitestone sent word for me to bring him a package of stuff from his house. Elsie fixed up the package—some paints and so on, as if it had just come from a shop. They knew me over at the prison. They didn't search the package very thoroughly. Elsie did it that way, so that I could have said I didn't know the automatic was in it. I'd have done that for Robert, anyhow . . . I saw him. . . ."

He fell silent and Hugh respected his silence. He too thought of Whitestone, and of Elsie.

"Let's get it over with," said Delancey again.

"But—don't you see . . . ? Apart from bringing the gun, you haven't done anything, Delancey."

"I have! I planned it. I brought her there, to the bridle-

path. If I hadn't, she'd—be alive now."

"There's no way of knowing that, Delancey. Accidents—"

"I planned it," said Delancey. "I had it in my heart. I'm responsible for her death—and I ought to pay."

"It's not a matter for the law," said Hugh. "See here! No one else knows—what you've just told me. No one else need ever know it."

Delancey looked at him, with a sort of wretched bewilderment.

"I'm responsible . . ." he said.

"No," said Hugh. "Delancey . . . I want you to come along with me, to Mrs. Luff's. . . ."

"*She* wouldn't want *me*—"

"She would," said Hugh. "She does. Come on, please! I want to see Elsie."

"She's at the cottage."

"Whitestone's cottage? Alone?"

"I don't know," Delancey answered. "There was somebody else there—a cousin of Robert's—but I don't know."

"We'll stop by there then."

It was difficult to get Delancey started. He had been tried beyond his endurance, and he would not quickly recover. He was dazed and stupid, and Hugh was obliged to display a patience he was far from feeling.

"She's capable of that . . ." he thought, while he tried to hurry Delancey. It was Elsie he meant, and it was death of which he believed her capable. There was death in the air, Rosalind, Josephine, Whitestone. . . . Not Elsie, Elsie must not die.

He got Delancey's car from the garage, he hurried Delancey into it, and he drove, very fast, to the cottage. He was afraid, greatly afraid. If Elsie wanted to die, die she would, leaving the world with scornful impatience. She would accept life only on her own terms, and if she didn't like it, she would fling it away.

"She's too young . . ." he thought. "I've *got* to be in time."

He stopped the car before the cottage.

"Wait here, will you?" he said to the subdued and docile man beside him.

As he hastened up the path, it occurred to him that this wasn't a good place for poor Delancey to wait in, but that could not be helped; wait there he must, outside the little house with lighted windows where his friend had lived. Hugh ran up the steps of the porch, and rang the bell. And no one came.

Somehow he had felt it would be like this. He rang again; then he tried the knob, and the door opened. He entered that most desolate little house. . . .

He went through it quickly; it was plain to be seen that Elsie was not here. Then he remembered how he had come here before, with her and Delancey, and no one had answered the bell.

"The summer-house," he thought.

It would be—a bad thing, to find her there. It was bad, even to think of her having gone there, alone. He opened the back door, and he saw a light there, at the foot of the little garden. The tree-toads were whistling, with a sort of eerie gaiety, the leaves stirred in the breeze, it was such a quiet night, he thought. . . . Such a lonely garden, with Rosalind and Robert Whitestone both gone. . . . Had Elsie come here, in the dark, to a dreadful rendezvous . . . ?

He did not think of knocking; he pushed open the door and there she was, standing beside a table, leaning over and writing something on a paper. She straightened up as he entered, and looked at him, and there was no surprise in her glance. She looked preoccupied, cold, very tired.

"Elsie . . ." he said.

"I've seen Bob's cousin," she said. "He's a horrible man. Cruel and stupid. All Bob's work—all these pictures—will belong to *him* now. And do you know what he said? He said: 'I suppose they'll have a certain value now, after all this . . . !' After—all this . . ."

She sat down on the edge of the table, and pushed her hair back from her forehead, her hand left a grimy mark on her brow, her eyes, dark with fatigue, looked enormous. She was young, fragile, alone, yet she could endure everything. She could face death and sorrow and loneliness without help.

"Elsie," he said, "will you marry me?"

She shook her head.

"No," she answered casually.

He sat down beside her. "I wish you would," he said. "I don't believe there's another girl like you in the world. I don't expect you to love me—"

"No. I've finished with *that*," she said, in the same matter-of-fact way. "But I like you. When you asked me to marry you, was it just because you were generous and wanted to help me?"

"Well . . . Not entirely," said Hugh, with a faint and rueful smile.

"Because if you want to help me," she went on. "I'll tell you what I want."

He was silent for a moment. He looked at her exquisite face, but she was not looking at him. And not thinking of him. Then and there he renounced forever a hope he had had.

"What can I do?" he asked. "I'll be glad."

"Lend me the money to buy Bob's pictures from his cousin," she said. "All of them. I've been making a list of them. . . . I'll rent a place, and exhibit them—decently. I'm going to see that people know the truth about Bob. I'd like to get out a little book about him and his work. . . . The truth—about his life. Not about his—poor, miserable end. . . ."

There were two slow tears running down her cheeks, and her face was wonderfully transfigured, rapt.

"I'll be glad," Hugh said again.

She did not thank him.

"Bob—was a genius," she said. "A great man. I want to spend my life—making people see that."

Whitestone's pictures stood about the room, and whether they were good or bad, Hugh did not know. But he did know that a legend was being created here, the legend of Robert Whitestone as a great man, a hero. And he thought it would grow, until the lie seemed a truth, because Elsie was herself a creature of heroic mould.

THE END

Take Your Pick from These Hard-to-Get Best-Selling Books!

Now you may enjoy many hours of exciting reading pleasure at a small fraction of the original cost. The POPULAR LIBRARY books are complete, full-length editions of successful novels formerly priced at \$2.00 or more.

If your bookseller or newsdealer cannot supply, order by mail from POPULAR LIBRARY, INC., 10 East Street, New York 16, N. Y. Enclose 30c (which includes cost of mailing and handling) for each book ordered. If you order 4 books or more, we pay the postage and need only enclose 25c per book.

Please order by number. Mail in your list promptly as only a limited number of copies of each of these series titles is still available.

Mysteries

- 136 APPOINTMENT WITH DANGER, by David Garth
- 133 ADVANCE AGENT, by John August
- 108 THE YELLOW VIOLET, by Frances Crane
- 81 THREE THIRDS OF A GHOST, by Timothy Fuller
- 76 FOG, by Valentine Williams and Dorothy Rice Sims
- 75 SHE FADED INTO AIR, by Ethel Lina White
- 74 MURDER IN SEASON, by Octavus Roy Cohen
- 73 HASTY WEDDING, by Mignon G. Eberhart
- 71 HELL LET LOOSE, by Francis Beeding
- 70 MR. POLTON EXPLAINS, by R. Austin Freeman
- 67 MURDER ON THE YACHT, by Rufus King

Westerns

- 151 DOUBLE CROSS RANCH, by Charles Alden Seltzer
- 149 HIDDEN BLOOD, by W. C. Tuttle
- 148 THE RANGER WAY, by Eugene Cunningham
- 145 GUNSMOKE TRAIL, by William MacLeod Raine
- 142 GUARDIANS OF THE DESERT, by Tom Gill
- 141 WINTER RANGE, by Alan LeMay
- 140 SECRET VALLEY, by Jackson Gregory

Specials

- 184 CARTOON FUN: Laugh Hits from the Nation's Top Writers
- 155 THE DREADFUL NIGHT, by Ben Ames Williams
- 150 CROSSWORD PUZZLES: Book Two
- 132 SEVEN KEYS TO BALDPATE, by Earl Derr Biggers
- 102 DUEL IN THE SUN, by Niven Busch

THE DEATH WISH**By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding**

Everyone thought Bob and Rosalind Whitestone were happily married. But to Bob, a struggling artist, life with Rosalind was torment, for she had artfully destroyed his faith in himself. Then Elsie appeared, with her beauty and her impassioned eagerness, and suddenly Bob knew he wanted to be free. With her coming life also took a new turn for Shawe Delancey, Bob's friend, who hated his rich, shrewish wife, Josephine. When Rosalind drowned and murder was hinted the resulting undertow of conflict and suspicion dragged them all down a dark trail of terror. And it doomed Delancey, who twice had dreamed Josephine dead—a dream that was a death wish!



S0-EDZ-909

